



HOUSE OF COMMONS
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES
CANADA

44th PARLIAMENT, 1st SESSION

Standing Committee on Official Languages

EVIDENCE

NUMBER 094

Monday, April 15, 2024

Chair: Mr. René Arseneault



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• (1530)

[*Translation*]

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

Welcome everyone to meeting number 94 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 resuming its study on federal funding for minority-language post-secondary education.

I won't go into all of the usual detail about the Zoom app since we are all pretty used to it by now. Please wait for me to recognize you by name and activate your microphone before speaking. I'd like the committee to know that everyone participating virtually has already done a sound check and found everything to be in order.

In this first hour, I'd like to welcome some familiar faces. First, from the Fédération des communautés francophones et acadienne du Canada, we have the organization's president, Liane Roy. This isn't her first time appearing before our committee.

Then, from the wonderful Université Sainte-Anne, in beautiful Nova Scotia, the cradle of Acadia, we have Allister Surette, president and vice-chancellor. We've seen him before, as well.

As you know, you'll have five minutes each to make your presentation. Then, we will move on to questions and answers for each political party. I'm strict about time, which can be a bit frustrating, but that's how we can get two rounds of questions.

I'll start with you, Ms. Roy. You have five minutes.

Ms. Liane Roy (President, Fédération des communautés francophones et acadienne du Canada): Mr. Chair, committee members, good afternoon.

I'd like to thank you for inviting me today.

As you know, the Fédération des communautés francophones et acadienne du Canada, or FCFA, is the national voice of 2.8 million French-speaking Canadians living in minority communities across nine provinces and three territories.

In 2021, the FCFA became co-organizer of the États généraux sur le postsecondaire en contexte francophone minoritaire. This major national consultation exercise, which we conducted jointly with the Association des collèges et universités de la francophonie canadienne, or ACUFC, was necessary, given the precarious, even fragile, situation of our post-secondary institutions. It was important to find coherent, systemic and sustainable solutions to consoli-

date the post-secondary sector, which is extremely important for the Canadian francophonie. The FCFA became a co-organizer of this national dialogue because colleges and universities are much more than educational institutions. They are part of the francophone community, places where people can live in French, places where young people can learn about francophone leadership, and research hubs that benefit the francophone community. In short, when we consider support for post-secondary education in French, we must do so from a holistic perspective that takes into account all the contributions that colleges and universities make to the vitality of communities.

I could spend hours describing the wealth of testimony we gathered during the national dialogue. I'd like to talk to you about the interruption that too often occurs in the French-language education continuum between high school and post-secondary education. I will tell you about the advantages of small institutions such as the Université de l'Ontario français or the Université Sainte-Anne. I will tell you about the immense value that international students bring not only to their college or university but also to their host communities. Finally, I will talk about the importance that the FCFA places on the completeness of the provision of French-language post-secondary education, which would come from increased collaboration between institutions.

The sheer volume of information collected and the massive size of the final report we published with the ACUFC in the fall of 2022 attest to the importance that the francophonie places on post-secondary education in French and the many roles that colleges and universities play.

I imagine this won't come as a surprise, but funding is but one of the major factors in the survival of these post-secondary institutions. This issue was at the heart of the *raison d'être* of the national dialogue, which brought to light the fact that it generally costs more to provide post-secondary education in French, whether because of the size of the institutions, the age of the infrastructure, the relative scarcity of French-language educational resources or the difficulty in recruiting human resources. Achieving substantive equality of access to post-secondary education cannot be achieved without acknowledging this fundamental asymmetry. This type of asymmetry illustrates why it was important to state clearly, in the modernized Official Languages Act, the importance of taking into account the specific realities of French and English, and of taking measures to protect and promote French.

If we're to achieve this substantive equality between the two official languages, the government must take into account the realities of our communities and provide the necessary resources so that every francophone wishing to pursue his or her post-secondary education in French can do so without facing obstacles that a student in the majority would not have to overcome. That doesn't mean you have to have a francophone university or college in each community. We could, however, consider providing mobility grants for francophone students—

• (1535)

The Chair: Please wrap up within 10 seconds, Ms. Roy.

Ms. Liane Roy: —who have to leave their community to study in French, or using levers for funding partnerships, for example.

That's why we've made three recommendations.

First, we recommend that the federal government introduce a tool to monitor all investments it makes in post-secondary education in francophone minority communities.

Second, we recommend that the federal government fund the establishment of a mechanism to measure progress towards substantive equality.

And third, we recommend that the federal government support the creation of a collaborative structure involving representatives from the Department of Canadian Heritage, provincial and territorial governments responsible for post-secondary education, post-secondary institutions in francophone minority communities and other sector stakeholders.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Roy.

Mr. Surette, you have five minutes.

Mr. Allister Surette (President and Vice-Chancellor, Université Sainte-Anne): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Members of the committee, thank you for having us today and for this extremely important study you are doing of Canada's French-language post-secondary sector.

As the chair has already mentioned, I'm the president and vice-chancellor of Université Sainte-Anne, the only French-language post-secondary institution in Nova Scotia.

It offers university and college programs, as well as immersion and French-language programs and customized training.

The university offers its programs and services through its five campuses, the first of which is located in Halifax, with the remaining four being deeply rooted in Nova Scotia's Acadian and francophone regions, coastal, rural and remote regions, and official language minority communities.

The university is firmly rooted in its environment. It is a partner of choice to enhance the vitality of the regions surrounding its campuses and of Nova Scotia's Acadian region as a whole.

The university works closely with other francophone partners in Nova Scotia, such as the Conseil de développement économique de la Nouvelle-Écosse and the Conseil scolaire acadien provincial, in the furtherance of cultural, linguistic, social and economic develop-

ment. On the one hand, in addition to training students, our infrastructure, such as the theatre, the library, the Centre acadien, the sports centre, among others also serves the local community. On the other hand, our main campus in the southwest part of the province is one of the largest employers in the region.

Over the years, our institution has distinguished itself by its firm desire to be actively involved in the communities, both for the development of the francophonie and for applied research aimed at the private sector, in order to ensure the betterment and the prosperity of our regions.

The university is a key partner in the action plan for francophone immigration to Nova Scotia, a plan that aims to grow the francophone population. With population growth a priority for the province of Nova Scotia, the province is aiming to double its total population by 2060.

Let's look at a few points and recommendations about funding.

I want to emphasize the importance, as the Official Languages Act indicates, of the federal government's commitment to and support for the vitality of minority communities and their development. The federal government must play a key role in protecting and promoting strong and present institutions to ensure that they serve our minority communities.

In addition to Université Sainte-Anne, Nova Scotia has 10 anglophone universities and one community college. Because of our small size and our francophone specificity, providing our programs and services costs us more, as the president of the FCFA mentioned, hence the importance of ongoing and stable federal funding. Even with this funding, we are far from being able to offer the same number of programs and services as our anglophone colleagues.

Given the limited Acadian and francophone population in Nova Scotia, recruitment outside of our province is essential. The recent announcement of a cap on study permits for international students will likely result in a decrease in enrolment in September 2024. This has a multi-year effect on our institutions. We have to maintain a certain number of registrations in order to maintain our programs. As a result, a 30% reduction in our international clientele will have an impact on our programs and will therefore pose another challenge for our institution this year.

More specifically, with respect to the Official Languages in Education Program, or OLEP, our regular funding hasn't been increased for years, and as you know, that funding wasn't indexed. For other OLEP programs, it is difficult to apply on a project-by-project basis due to limited human resources, and I think you've already heard a lot about the challenge of equal funding.

In conclusion, I support the recommendations made by the Association des collèges et universités de la francophonie canadienne and by the FCFA, as well as several other recommendations heard here. I think the government should commit to supporting the creation of a collaborative structure—I can talk about that later—bringing together representatives of the Department of Canadian Heritage and other federal departments, provincial and territorial governments and post-secondary institutions.

• (1540)

Thank you for your attention, and I'm ready to answer your questions.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Surette.

Let's get started with the first round of questions. Each political party will have six minutes to ask their questions and listen to the answers.

Let's start with Bernard Généreux, representing the Conservatives.

Mr. Généreux, you have six minutes.

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

I'd also like to thank the witnesses.

Good day, Ms. Roy. I hope you're well.

Since we began our study, we've had the opportunity to speak with a variety of stakeholders. As you've stated, you organized, together with the Association des collèges et universités de la francophonie canadienne, the États généraux sur le postsecondaire francophone en contexte minoritaire.

I will give you the opportunity to repeat the three recommendations in the report of this national dialogue, because you only briefly mentioned them in your presentation. I'd very much like for you to expand on them in your response.

That being said, we get the sense that, despite the Liberal government's additional spending over the past eight years, the problems have not yet been resolved. I'd like you to explain to me why, despite the new amounts allocated to the Canadian francophonie as a whole, this component isn't more functional or doesn't produce better results.

• (1545)

Ms. Liane Roy: Thank you very much, Mr. Généreux.

Indeed, I briefly mentioned three recommendations in my presentation. One of them was also mentioned by Mr. Surette.

These three recommendations can be found in the report of the États généraux sur le postsecondaire francophone en contexte minoritaire. They are recommendations 30, 31 and 32.

Recommendation 30 is as follows.

That the federal government introduce a tool to monitor all investments it makes in post-secondary education in francophone minority communities.

So this relates to the question you posed about funding.

This means that, given that post-secondary education is a key factor in the vitality of francophone and Acadian communities, given the mandate of Treasury Board, which was set out in Bill C-13 and which we are all familiar with, and given the magnitude of the problems facing the post-secondary sector in minority regions, it is important to understand the importance of the nature of investments by all federal authorities.

Essentially, what we're saying is that the left hand really needs to know what the right hand is doing.

Mr. Bernard Généreux: So if I understand correctly, you're saying that that's not currently the case.

Ms. Liane Roy: I'm simply saying that we need to have a better understanding in order to get a broader picture of all the funds going to post-secondary education—

Mr. Bernard Généreux: Forgive me for interrupting, Ms. Roy.

When you talk of federal funds, are you also talking about funding for the provinces or strictly about funding for education?

Ms. Liane Roy: I'm also referring to funding earmarked for the provinces for post-secondary education, those that are identified in that way.

The Department of Canadian Heritage needs to target community development more directly, which goes back to what Mr. Surette mentioned. Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, or IRCC, and Employment and Social Development Canada, or ESDC, for example, could also be involved.

We really need to make sure we can see the big picture in terms of education, research, innovation and infrastructure. Education doesn't exist in a vacuum. If we cast a broader net, then we're also talking about the Tri-Council research funding. There's innovation, and there's also infrastructure.

The second recommendation is as follows:

That the federal government fund the establishment of a mechanism to measure progress towards substantive equality of post-secondary education in francophone minority communities.

This builds on the first recommendation that deals with investments. We need to develop a new mechanism to measure real progress. Such a mechanism would allow us to collect data on the different dimensions of post-secondary education and determine if the federal government's investments are having the desired effects.

The way things are happening now is that funds are handed out, but their results are neither measured nor assessed. Are these funds having the desired effects?

The approach to developing this mechanism would recognize the particular social, cultural, scientific and economic contexts in which post-secondary institutions operate in francophone minority settings. As you know, Pointe-de-l'Église and Toronto have slightly different contexts.

The third recommendation is as follows:

That the federal government support the creation of a collaborative structure involving representatives from the Department of Canadian Heritage, provincial and territorial governments responsible for post-secondary education, post-secondary institutions in francophone minority communities and other sector stakeholders.

When this recommendation was made, IRCC hadn't yet announced any measures. Other stakeholders involved in specific fields could also participate in this collaborative structure in more specific cases.

So it's fairly clear that we need—

• (1550)

Mr. Bernard Généreux: Ms. Roy, if you don't mind—

The Chair: Please respond in under 15 seconds.

Mr. Bernard Généreux: I'd like to say one last thing. There is a lot of talk of the structures that should be set up, but maybe taking action would be preferable. That said, the witnesses will have an opportunity to expand on that in their answers to members' questions.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Généreux.

Ms. Koutrakis, you have six minutes.

Ms. Annie Koutrakis (Vimy, Lib.): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I thank the witnesses for being here.

Ms. Roy, I'd like to ask you the same question my colleague asked you. What form do you envision the collaborative structure taking? What would its vision and mission be? How will they work together, and to what end?

Could you go into greater detail for us?

Ms. Liane Roy: Thank you very much for the question.

The details are fairly straightforward. There needs to be a committee or a group tasked with monitoring the investments to see where the funds end up.

As I've said before, some of the funding that doesn't come from the Department of Canadian Heritage is earmarked for research, and others for innovation, for infrastructure or for post-secondary education.

What matters is that we know where these funds end up and what they're used for.

We need to ensure there is some follow-up and some accountability. Were these funds used for what they were meant to be used? Tracking these investments would allow us to know if the funds for post-secondary education in minority communities are producing the desired results and are going to the right place.

Ms. Annie Koutrakis: Are you aware of other similar structures that work? It could be a structure used by an association, for example.

Ms. Liane Roy: We need to ensure that someone is responsible for monitoring those funds. That could be done by an association or by a department.

Ms. Annie Koutrakis: What I'd like to know is who exactly would be doing the monitoring. Who would be responsible for getting results?

Ms. Liane Roy: I think we need to look at it as a whole. What you're raising in your question is exactly what we'd like to see implemented. As we've said, the Association des collèges et univer-

sités de la francophonie canadienne could be responsible for ensuring the funds are going to the right places. That said, a department could also do it if that would be easier.

Just like for the modernization of the Official Languages Act, we need a conductor, someone who will ensure there's some accountability on the issue of where these funds are invested.

Ms. Annie Koutrakis: Thank you, Ms. Roy.

Mr. Surette, in your view, what impact does your institution have on the minority language community in your area? How important is it to the sustainability of the francophonie on the local and provincial levels?

Mr. Allister Surette: I could speak at length about the impact of Université Sainte-Anne on Pointe-de-l'Église, a community of fewer than 10,000 people. If the university did not exist, the community would be entirely different on the social, cultural and economic levels.

I've been president of the university for 13 years. One of the commitments I made at the start of my term was to create a strategic focus that I like to call "community anchoring".

I wanted to make sure that we weren't sitting in an ivory tower, in other words, I wanted the university to get involved in the community in many different ways.

For example, I wanted to make sure that the infrastructure on campus was accessible to the local community. I am thinking, among other things, of the theatre, the new soccer field, the new race track, the sports centre and the amphitheatres. All of those are available to the community. I also wanted to make sure that members of the administration, students and, above all, faculty who do research are very involved in the community. For example, we do a lot of applied research with the private sector, not to mention all the work we do in partnership with francophone and Acadian organizations to advance our communities.

I imagine I don't have much time, so—

• (1555)

Ms. Annie Koutrakis: Thank you very much. I only have a minute left.

Is the current network of post-secondary institutions meeting the needs of francophone communities outside Quebec? As I only have a minute left, I would ask you to answer briefly.

Mr. Allister Surette: I imagine you're talking about the broader network.

We belong to a number of national organizations, some of which I've chaired. The same challenges often come up. I think that consultation is important because, in many cases, the federal government and the various agencies and departments are disconnected from the provinces and territories. For example, in Nova Scotia, we have the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, we have the Department of Advanced Education, which is normally not involved in the slightest in funding the Official Languages in Education Program, and finally, we have the institutions. If all these groups could only work together to discuss the wider issues in some detail, that would be important, in my opinion.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Surette and Ms. Koutrakis.

The third speaker is the second vice-chair of the committee and a member of the Bloc Québécois.

Mr. Beaulieu, you have six minutes.

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

My first question is for Ms. Roy.

A number of studies have shown the chronic underfunding of post-secondary institutions in francophone minority settings. Can you tell us a little more about the causes and tell us why you think things will improve over the next few years? Do you see things starting to get better? Are the recommendations you've made being implemented?

Ms. Liane Roy: Thank you for your question, Mr. Beaulieu.

I hope things are getting better. I hope we didn't draft the final report of the États généraux sur le postsecondaire en contexte francophone minoritaire for nothing. At the very least, it's making people and the government aware of the importance of post-secondary institutions in our minority regions and of the weakening of our regions.

Underfunding is nothing new. As I mentioned in my opening statement, many institutions in our regions are located in old religious buildings and so on. There are also a lot of infrastructure costs, to ensure that they're up to modern standards.

Underfunding comes from several places, such as provincial and territorial authorities, as you know. The federal government often invests in official languages in the provinces and territories. It's the same thing with regard to post-secondary and early childhood education. The needs aren't always well known, and as a result, meeting them can be difficult.

The goal of the national dialogue was to identify all those needs and figure out which areas of our institutions had the greatest funding shortfalls. The funding issue is complex, which is why we recommended developing a tool that would allow us to track all those investments. That way, we could ensure that post-secondary institutions in our communities can access these funds directly.

I mentioned research, another area where francophone institutions and researchers have a really hard time getting their hands on funding. This is some of the collateral damage that is also affecting post-secondary education. University president Mr. Surette is probably in a much better position than me to speak in greater detail to the issue of institutional funding.

• (1600)

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: I'll be giving Mr. Surette the opportunity to respond, but before that, I'd like to touch on the asymmetry you mentioned earlier.

We know that the Government of Quebec is overfunding anglophone universities. According to the last figures I saw, 22% of the funding goes to anglophone universities, whereas the anglophone minority represents about 8% or 9% of Quebec's population. In terms of federal funding for research support funds, English-lan-

guage universities in Quebec receive between 35% and 40% of the funding.

Don't you think that all of this should be recalibrated, particularly the criteria for funding research funds? It has been said that francophone universities outside Quebec and francophone universities in Quebec are disadvantaged.

Mr. Surette or Ms. Roy, could you tell us more about that?

Ms. Liane Roy: For research funding, I will give the floor to Mr. Surette. There are significant needs on the francophone side for this.

Mr. Allister Surette: I think that you have already heard that the largest universities are more apt to get research funding since English is the dominant language in this field. On one hand, that makes it harder for our researchers to request funding and, on the other hand, in many cases, they get the impression that they are more likely to be heard if they write or apply in English. That is one challenge.

We are a very small minority, both among post-secondary institutions and in the general public, especially here in Nova Scotia. We have a student population of 500 individuals, while there are nine anglophone universities and a large anglophone community college. We are still far from substantive equality. We offer far fewer programs.

The provincial government generally underfunds all the universities, but it is much more obvious here at home because we cannot manage to achieve the economies of scale and offer all the services and programs that we want to offer. It is a bit like the chicken and the egg. We cannot attract the students if we do not offer as many programs as the anglophone universities.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Surette. You can elaborate in answering other questions.

We will now hear the last questions for this round, those from the New Democratic Party.

Ms. Ashton, you have six minutes.

Ms. Niki Ashton (Churchill—Keewatinook Aski, NDP): Thank you very much.

Welcome to the witnesses.

My first question is for you, Ms. Roy. Obviously, the purpose of this study is to make recommendations to the federal government. You have already made three, but I want to make sure that I understand one request in particular.

We know that repeated requests for funding by francophone post-secondary institutions, to be able to fulfill their mission within francophone communities, are not being met. To be clear, is the FCFA requesting more funding for francophone minority post-secondary institutions?

Ms. Liane Roy: Thank you for your question, Ms. Ashton.

The answer is simple: yes. We certainly support the requests from the Association des collèges et universités de la francophonie canadienne, the ACUFC. It is perfectly familiar with its network and we support it. The ACUFC is requesting \$80 million in additional funding to have stable core funding. That is why we support its request.

Ms. Niki Ashton: Thank you for clarifying.

I want to come back to the connection between the francophone universities and the community. You talked about it, Mr. Surette, and other witnesses did as well. We know that francophone universities are essential to minority communities. They allow for a continuum in education. They contribute to the vitality of the communities and they allow people to live in French on the campuses and in the municipalities.

Ms. Roy and Mr. Surette, can you elaborate on the importance or the central character of francophone universities for minority communities?

• (1605)

Ms. Liane Roy: Yes, absolutely.

The community component is the reason we wanted to participate in the national dialogue on post-secondary education in a francophone minority context. Post-secondary institutions are places with a student social life, but they are also important for the neighbouring communities. Mr. Surette talked a bit about the importance of Université Sainte-Anne to his region in Nova Scotia and the same goes everywhere there are colleges and universities. They promote youth leadership, establish a connection with the secondary schools and ensure a continuum of education. In the case of universities, these are places where all the buildings are available for volunteer activities and to groups who want to organize various activities there. This community component is integral to the institutions.

For example, in rural regions where there is a post-secondary school, it is often the main employer in the region. You can imagine what the presence of such an establishment does economically speaking. It has an impact on jobs, on people's health and on all the establishments in the region. Each institution plays a role in the community.

Mr. Allister Surette: Would you like me to add something?

Ms. Niki Ashton: Yes, please.

Mr. Allister Surette: We are putting on a presentation on community anchoring at a conference next week. I am currently on the main campus of Université Sainte-Anne. I have a view of Baie Sainte-Marie and I can see a lighthouse. Our university is the only one that has a lighthouse on campus, so keep in mind that we are in a very rural area. We are integrated in our community. We are one of the largest employers in our community.

Earlier I made reference to the private sector. We have a special partnership agreement with the Nova Scotia Economic Development Board. We work with lobster fishers on the quality of lobster and aquaculture. We also have a special partnership with the homogenized francophone school board here in Nova Scotia, the Aca-

dian provincial school board. I am sure that Darrell Samson has spoken to you about it.

We work closely on the teacher shortage file. Here, we offer a BA in education. That is one of our special programs. We are trying to train teachers for the system.

In a purely social context, we welcomed Bernard Voyer a week or two ago. He put on a really nice presentation not only to the university community, but also to the local community. There are also seminars and so on.

We are really integrated in our community.

As I was saying earlier, as president, I have been very involved in advancing the cause of Nova Scotia's francophonie, including as president of not-for-profit associations. As you know, French is very precarious in our communities. English is dominant in social media, anglophone media and among our young people. We have to make a concerted effort and certainly come together with other community organizations. I talked about governments earlier, but there are also community organizations.

I work a lot with the regional municipality where the main campus is located. You can imagine what an asset it is for the municipality of the region to have an institution like ours and its infrastructure.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Surette and Ms. Ashton.

The Chair: The next questions will be asked by the first vice-chair of this committee, Mr. Joël Godin.

You have five minutes.

Ms. Niki Ashton: Thank you, Chair.

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

I want to thank our witnesses, Ms. Roy and Mr. Surette.

Ms. Roy, we have the privilege of having regular discussions. We worked actively together on the modernization of the Official Languages Act, and I felt privileged.

The new version of the Official Languages Act mentions post-secondary studies. That is the first time.

Ms. Roy, how does this new legislation provide additional tools to ensure the vitality and survival of francophone post-secondary institutions in official language minority communities?

• (1610)

Ms. Liane Roy: Thank you for your question, Mr. Godin.

I think that is why we worked so hard on modernizing this legislation. This is the first time that legislation mentions the continuum of education, from early childhood to post-secondary education, from everything having to do with formal training, non-formal and informal, as well as everything to do with consultation, which is found in Part VII of the Official Languages Act. It was important to specify these things in this legislation.

This legislation includes another very important component and that is the possibility of consulting stakeholders and the community to see how we can meet the needs of the community. As we just saw, the community is vast and the same goes for the institutions.

There is also the whole issue of the precariousness and decline of French. Achieving equality of status and use of French includes post-secondary schools as well because that is where we train people and our workforce of tomorrow. That is also where we train thinkers and educators.

Mr. Joël Godin: Thank you, Ms. Roy.

Ms. Liane Roy: I apologize.

Mr. Joël Godin: Do not apologize. It is always a pleasure to hear what you have to say. However, you know that our time is limited here in committee.

I hear you. You say that the legislation allows for consultations to be held and that is the first time the legislation mentions it.

Tangibly, are there tools in this legislation that will help stop the decline of French, or protect or promote both official languages? Obviously, the most vulnerable language is French. How does this legislation, which was implemented a year ago, provide additional tools?

Ms. Roy, you may begin to answer, but I will ask Mr. Surette to respond as well.

Ms. Liane Roy: Of course, the regulations will clarify several aspects of the legislation. We still do not have all the wording of the regulations, but we are working hard with the various stakeholders, including Canadian Heritage and Treasury Board, to ensure that it will be used as a solid foundation for enforcing the legislation. As part of the education agreements on post-secondary instruction, the federal government is required to take the necessary measures to ensure that these elements are in the agreements. I can list the sections: 41—

Mr. Joël Godin: That is not necessary, Ms. Roy. Thank you very much.

Mr. Surette, I would like to hear your opinion on this. I have more specific questions to ask you after that, if I have time.

What tangible tools have you been using daily since the legislation came into force a year ago?

Mr. Allister Surette: I am not sure that we have tangible tools, but the act does contain some tools that we can benefit from. We are certainly still waiting to see the regulations. When I was in government, it was always the details in the legislation that mattered. We are still waiting for those details.

The encouraging thing is that we have the means, the legislative tools that we should be able to use to advance our institutions. Post-secondary education has received funding through the official languages in education programs; that is new and it is very positive for our sector. Have we received enough? No, and we will always say that we have not received enough. The fact that we received this funding is very promising.

The other part in all that—

Mr. Joël Godin: Quickly, Mr. Surette, because I have other questions for you that I want to squeeze in.

Mr. Allister Surette: Okay.

I wanted to say that the more the role of the province, the territory, the federal government is clarified—I think you already noted this—the better off we will be. It is so divided that it is hard for us, as a client, to navigate between the province and the federal level and its different departments. Collaboration could be a good tool—

Mr. Joël Godin: Mr. Surette, I would like you to make a comparison between 2010 and 2024.

Could you send us the following information: the number of francophone students in 2010 and in 2024; the number of fully francophone programs in 2010 and 2024; and the number of foreign francophone students in 2010 and in 2024? You can send that data to our clerk. That would be interesting to see and might indicate to us what areas we need to work on.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Godin and Mr. Surette.

The next questions will be asked by the shyest member of our committee.

Mr. Samson, you have the floor. You have five minutes.

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

I also want to thank my two colleagues for their presentation this afternoon.

As you know, it is extremely important work. I think this is the first time we are doing a study on post-secondary institutions in the context of official languages, namely French.

I will certainly commend my friend Mr. Beaulieu for his efforts, also knowing that it is important to address, now, school and pre-school, which, I hope, will be part of our analyses.

I would like to begin by noting that we have made a lot of progress with the fact that the act recognizes post-secondary education as well as pre-secondary education, even though it is not included in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, as stipulated in article 23 at the time. Progress has been made.

One of my questions is on the reaction of the provinces. Do they agree with all this?

I will try to ask short questions.

Ms. Roy, I want to know more about your third recommendation, on the collaboration structure. Tell me briefly about this. Is it similar to the Table nationale en éducation that still exists today?

• (1615)

Ms. Liane Roy: It could be similar, but it is different. It would be very focused on the post-secondary sector and might truly influence what goes on there. Collaboration is important because it would truly help the different bodies become aware of the challenges at the post-secondary institutions.

Mr. Darrell Samson: I agree with you. I know how effective the Table nationale en éducation has been and I see that it may be time to create a collaboration structure for funding post-secondary institutions.

I also want to thank you, as well as your federation and all the member organizations, for the work you have done for bills C-31 and C-35 because it also focuses on institutions responsible for early childhood education, which is very important.

Mr. Surette, it is always a pleasure to see you.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank you for your hard and extremely effective work in connection with Université Sainte-Anne, as well as your contribution on the provincial, national and international levels for the establishment. You were a key player as director general of the Acadian provincial school board. I very much liked working with you and I thank you again.

That being said, I would like to address two topics: the ceiling on study permits and the official languages in education program.

Ever since the minister announced a strategy to control the number of foreign students he wants to welcome, I understand that the discussions in Nova Scotia seem to be advancing. I would like to know your opinion on the matter.

Has federal-provincial funding for post-secondary institutions increased since 2015? I would like to hear you say that is the case.

Are the criteria that francophone post-secondary institutions and universities need to meet different from those imposed on anglophone institutions?

For example, when I was working at the school board, I had different categories to rank, including cultural facilitators, investments in early childhood, recruitment, and so on. Do you think these categories exist?

Mr. Allister Surette: No, these categories do not exist. There is only basic funding.

We have an agreement with the province of Nova Scotia that allocates overall funding of \$380 million. A formula is applied to divide this funding between 10 universities.

As I mentioned, we are the only one of these 10 universities that is francophone, and it is very small. The formula uses the same criteria for minority francophone institutions, rural institutions, and so forth. However, it is very limited.

The short answer is no. If we want francophone facilitators, then we need to include the cost in our budget.

Mr. Darrell Samson: In my opinion, that is the main objective of a consultation structure. There are public schools in Nova Scotia and they were able to distinguish themselves. If the criteria for securing core funding were different, perhaps they could get more to

meet their objectives, so I would also like to see that happen from that perspective.

I understand that about 30% of your students are international students. What impact do those students have on the vitality of communities in Nova Scotia and on your institution?

Mr. Allister Surette: They have a major impact on our institution because they represent 30% of our population.

As I mentioned, since we are a very small university, only a very limited number of students are accepted into our programs. Immersion students make up about 25% of our student body, and it is very important for our university to add these foreign students and immersion students to our Acadian and francophone population.

• (1620)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Surette.

I'm sorry to interrupt you, but we're out of time. You will have the chance to speak later when answering questions from other members.

Mr. Beaulieu, you have two and a half minutes.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: Mr. Surette, your university also has a lot of immersion students.

What percentage of students are doing all of their studies in French and what percentage are taking the immersion program at Université Sainte-Anne?

Mr. Allister Surette: I'm not sure I understood your question correctly.

At Université Sainte-Anne, everything is done in French.

We are in the business of school management, as they refer to it in the public schools. All of our programs and courses are given in French.

When I talk about immersion students, I am talking about public school immersion students who are francophiles or francophones. They attend the same courses and programs as foreign students and our francophone and Acadian students.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: Are the immersion students anglophones who want to learn French?

Who are the students who attend the immersion program at Université Sainte-Anne?

Mr. Allister Surette: That is what I'm trying to explain. We don't have an immersion program per se, other than the summer programs for anglophones who want to learn French. Those are courses that we offer during the summer for a period of five weeks.

During the normal school year, a student who wants to do a bachelor of education, for example, must have the necessary French skills to take the program at our university.

When I talk about immersion students, I am talking about students who have graduated from English public schools but who speak French really well and who take courses and programs at our university. There are two different things—

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: What is the approximate percentage of anglophone students who decide to study at your university?

Mr. Allister Surette: As I said, about 30% of our students are international students, mainly from African countries, and depending on the year, about 25% of our students are anglophones who speak French really well. The other students are Acadians or francophones, mainly from the Maritimes but also from elsewhere in Canada.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: Okay. Thank you.

We talked a lot about creating a consultation structure.

Right now, there is the protocol for agreements for minority-language education and second-language instruction. Various structures already exist, but in your opinion, they don't work and they are not effective enough.

The Chair: That is an excellent question, Mr. Beaulieu, but the answer will have to wait.

The next speaker is Ms. Ashton.

You have two and a half minutes.

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

I wanted to talk more about the labour shortages in education.

You talked about that earlier, Mr. Surette. That is a reality that we are very familiar with in the French education system and the French immersion system here in Manitoba. Obviously, that is a challenge that is undermining our society's ability to educate the next generation.

I have spoken about my personal experience before. I am the result of a French immersion system here in Manitoba. My parents' generation fought hard for us to be able to get an education in French. Now, such opportunities exist in theory, but we do not have enough teachers for our children.

Could you tell me briefly about the reality in Nova Scotia in that regard? How bad is the labour shortage there? Why is stable core funding essential to support your education programs and produce new graduates who can teach our children?

Mr. Allister Surette: That's a good question.

The simple answer is that, like many provinces in Canada, Nova Scotia is facing a major labour shortage, particularly when it comes to French language teachers and French immersion teachers.

We are unable to recruit enough students to fill the number of spaces in the program for various reasons. I think that we need to hold a marketing campaign or a campaign to promote the profession to make the program more attractive. We also need to be creative when it comes to recruiting students.

Let me give a quick example.

One of the things that we are trying to do is to reach agreements with universities in France to recruit students who meet pretty much all of the criteria to get a bachelor of education. What we would do, here in Canada, is to help them complete their training in one year or less. Then, they could quickly enter the labour market.

We have to get really creative because, quite honestly, I don't think we have a large enough clientele here, particularly a franco-phone clientele, to address the shortage of teachers.

• (1625)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Surette.

Thank you, Ms. Ashton.

Ms. Niki Ashton: Thank you.

The Chair: Ms. Roy and Mr. Surette, if I happened to cut you off when you were saying something important, please send us any additional information that you think would be useful in completing the answers to the questions that you were asked. I have the unfortunate task of having to cut people off, so that the committee members all get the same amount of time. That is very important to them.

Please send any additional information to our clerk, who will pass it on to all members of the committee.

Thank you again for being here. It was really great.

On that note, we will now suspend momentarily to bring in our next witnesses.

Have a good day.

We're suspending the meeting.

• (1625)

(Pause)

• (1625)

The Chair: We're resuming our study and starting our second hour with new witnesses.

Joining us by videoconference is Taylor Good, co-president, Association des universitaires de la faculté Saint-Jean, and Gino LeBlanc, director, Office of Francophone and Francophile Affairs, Simon Fraser University.

I will keep the guidelines regarding the use of Zoom brief. Since the pandemic, everyone knows how it works.

All I will say is please turn off your microphone when you're not speaking.

There will be a first round of questions with six minutes per party.

I would ask the witnesses to keep their opening remarks to a maximum of five minutes each. I have to be strict when it comes to time because we want to be able to have two rounds of questions.

We'll start with you, Mr. Good. You have five minutes.

Mr. Taylor Good (Co-President, Association des universitaires de la faculté Saint-Jean): Hello everyone.

First of all, I would like to thank you for inviting me to appear before the Standing Committee on Official Languages this evening.

My name is Taylor Good. I'm a student in my final year of a bachelor of education degree at the University of Alberta's Saint-Jean campus. I am also the co-president of the association of university students at the Saint-Jean campus, also known as AUFSJ.

The purpose of the AUFSJ is to support students in their post-secondary learning by providing them with services in French, advocating for their interests, organizing social and cultural activities, supporting academic life, and promoting French and bilingual culture. The AUFSJ is also responsible for helping students get familiar with the campus, helping them better integrate into university life and advocating on their behalf with various community stakeholders.

I am proud to say that I have been part of the AUFSJ for three years. During that time, the Saint-Jean campus has undergone significant changes.

Let me share with you two situations that the students in my graduating class have experienced.

First, since I became a member of the AUFSJ, our campus has survived a pandemic that had a profound impact on post-secondary institutions, including serious underfunding at all levels of government. As a result, the Saint-Jean campus was forced to cut key elements of its programming, including many of the courses it offered as part of its programs. The Saint-Jean campus used to have six programs, three of which were offered entirely in French. Today, only one of those programs is available entirely in French, the one that I am part of, the education program. The pandemic also forced the Saint-Jean campus to make cuts to infrastructure investments, which has negatively impacted the upgrading of buildings and technology.

That being said, I am pleased to share a second situation with you today, and that is that the Saint-Jean campus has been able to overcome those challenges. Over the past two years, two major investments were announced. First, in June 2022, a \$13.3-million agreement was reached between the federal government, the Government of Alberta, and the University of Alberta to increase faculty, increase the number of programs and courses offered in French, and improve infrastructure. This funding will also strengthen the visibility of the Saint-Jean campus through cultural activities and multidisciplinary activities at the national level.

I am happy to say that, since that time, we have seen many improvements in all of those areas. Major technological improvements have been made in all of our classrooms. In terms of pro-

gramming, the Saint-Jean campus announced that, as of September 2024, it would be accepting applications for a new transdisciplinary doctoral program. This is an important step in Alberta's French-language education continuum, because it will enable students in Alberta to pursue their entire education in French, from kindergarten to doctoral studies.

In terms of visibility, the investment also enabled about sixty students from all of our programs to participate in the Political Science Games, which took place at McGill University and the University of Sherbrooke. There, the Saint-Jean campus ranked fourth among nine francophone institutions from across the country. If there is one thing to remember here this evening, it is the one thing that these situations have in common, and that is the importance of federal funding.

The first situation shows the impact that a lack of funding has had and could have on the Saint-Jean campus. Major cuts were made to the campus's investments and most of its programs. The campus took part in a national awareness campaign called "Save Saint-Jean", because students and members of the community were worried that the Saint-Jean campus would not be able to offer the high-quality programming that it once did.

The second situation shows the impact that federal funding can have. A total of 75% of the \$13.3 million in investments that I mentioned earlier came from the federal government. These investments made it possible to make a whole host of improvements, the benefits of which are finally being felt today. Francophone communities can now count on having the teachers, nurses, first responders and entrepreneurs they need to maintain a thriving community. We are talking about a francophone community that is constantly evolving thanks to the increased number of francophone newcomers from around the world who are settling here in Edmonton with their young families in search of a French education. We are also talking about a francophone post-secondary faculty that is part of an institution that is looking to welcome 60,000 students over the next decade.

I wonder what role the Saint-Jean campus plays in these two different landscapes. Some may say that post-secondary education is a provincial matter, but I would argue that the preservation of the French language is a federal priority.

When the federal—

• (1630)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Good.

You'll be able to talk about that more during the question and answer period.

I now yield to Gino LeBlanc for five minutes.

Go ahead, Mr. LeBlanc, we're listening.

Mr. Gino LeBlanc (Director, Office of Francophone and Francophile Affairs, Simon Fraser University): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Good afternoon, Mr. Chair, and Vice-Chairs Godin and Beaulieu.

I don't know if he is here today, but I'd also like to say hello to your colleague from British Columbia, Mr. Dalton, who's also a member of the committee. I met him recently.

My name is Gino LeBlanc. I'm an associate professor with the Faculty of Education at Simon Fraser University here in Vancouver.

I'm attending today's meeting as director of the Office of Francophone and Francophile Affairs, or OFFA, at Simon Fraser University.

Twenty years ago, the first action plan for official languages established a partnership with the province of British Columbia to create the French-language minority education research hub that we have today at Simon Fraser University.

The role of our office is to assist the faculties, particularly in the arts and social sciences, education and health sciences, in implementing and supporting programs in French.

You could think of us a bit like the hub of the French-language education continuum. "Continuum" is an important word. It has been used a lot during your meetings. We are the hub of the French-language education continuum.

In 20 years, we've trained about 5,000 graduates. We support 275 to 300 students who study in French at the bachelor's, master's or doctoral level every year. Our role is to support not only the faculties, but also the students. I think the previous witnesses talked about that very important role. We are also active in community development. We issue diplomas and deliver training. We are also a driving force in promoting the vitality of French, a goal that's important to the Parliament of Canada and to Simon Fraser University.

In my short, five-minute speech, I would like to talk about the new Official Languages Act, which mentions post-secondary education. In particular, the new section 41, gives us new program funding capacity. That support is significant.

I also want to point out that the action plan for official languages 2023–2028: protection-promotion-collaboration will support us. The lion's share of our funding comes from the Official Languages in Education Program, or OLEP. I heard Mr. Samson allude to it earlier. It's a really important item.

A little ironically, we don't really have a seat at the federal-provincial table. Among your report's suggested improvements and recommendations, it would be helpful to include a place at this table for post-secondary institutions, in one way or another. We have a fairly good relationship with the Ministry of Post-Secondary Education and Future Skills, but we are always sidelined during these debates. We are not at the negotiating table, and it would be an advantage, or added value, for the post-secondary funding process in francophone communities across Canada if we were.

Funding is not the only factor involved in meeting the challenges inherent in offering all programs in French outside Quebec. However, I nevertheless want to talk about the importance of stable, predictable, multi-year funding. As I recently said to some of my colleagues, university programs last at least four, maybe five years. Doctorates can take longer. We want to hire professors, support students, and create a student experience and a francophone space.

However, our funding cycles are rarely longer than 24 months. The last funding cycles for the official languages in education program were 24 months. Sometimes, universities are forced to make a leap of faith and hope things will carry on.

The word "continuum" is used a lot, but more work needs to be done on implementing new public policies consistent with the continuum concept, in other words, from preschool to the primary and on to the post-secondary levels. When you make your recommendations, I invite you to consider what the word "continuum" means. Is it limited to kindergarten or preschool programs, or from the primary to the post-secondary levels?

Earlier, you alluded to the Table nationale sur l'éducation. The final report of the États généraux de l'éducation postsecondaire en contexte francophone minoritaire is a key document that deserves your consideration.

The Office of Francophone and Francophile Affairs, or OFFA, of Simon Fraser University in British Columbia is the university member of the Association des collèges et universités de la francophonie canadienne, or ACUFC. We fully endorse the recommendations arising from the États généraux. Our outlook is national.

Of course, the jurisdiction is shared. We know that complicates things. However, I am truly optimistic. I feel confident that we can establish a stable, multi-year, adequate funding structure.

Mr. Arseneault, are my five minutes up?

• (1635)

The Chair: You have 25 seconds left.

Mr. Gino LeBlanc: Okay.

We have five priorities under the action plan for official languages 2024–2028.

First, we want to add more courses to offer a more comprehensive range of programs in French.

Second, we want to offer an enriching learning environment in French, because we have a very small minority-language community in British Columbia.

Third, we want to form closer ties with francophone communities. In fact, we are members of the Fédération des francophones de la Colombie-Britannique.

Fourth, we want to train a bilingual workforce for British Columbia and Canada.

Fifth, and last, we want to foster employment for our graduates in relevant jobs and in a job market where they use their French and English skills.

However, I would have —

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Like Mr. Good, you'll have a chance to speak more on that later. Congratulations, by the way, on the quality of your French. Hats off!

We'll now begin the first round of questions. Each political party will have six minutes to ask questions and listen to the answers.

We'll start with the Conservative Party, represented by Mrs. Stephanie Kusie.

• (1640)

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

I thank the witnesses for being here.

Mr. Good, I'm from Alberta, from Calgary to be precise. I wanted to let you know that a former Conservative member of the committee, Laila Goodridge, obtained her bachelor's degree from the Faculté Saint-Jean at the University of Alberta. At the time, her father asked her what she was going to do with a bachelor's degree from the Faculté Saint-Jean, and now she's an MP. If you ask me, it has served her well.

When I have meetings with the Association canadienne-française de l'Alberta, or ACFA, the most important topic of conversation for me is the Faculté Saint-Jean. So far, I've had at least two meetings with the ACFA about the Faculté Saint-Jean.

Here's my question: What funding mechanism does the university use to maintain and fund its student programs?

Mr. Taylor Good: That's a good question.

In fact, the Faculté Saint-Jean is part of the University of Alberta. The mechanisms that it uses to fund its programs and develop its budget are provided by the University of Alberta. It's predetermined.

I remember many discussions that I've had in the past about the mechanisms used. One of the topics we discussed was how the budget, set by the University of Alberta, would be shared among the faculties. That's how things stand as far as funding mechanisms at the Faculté Saint-Jean go.

As for investments, provincial funding is paid to the University of Alberta, which then determines how the money is distributed between the Faculté Saint-Jean and the other faculties.

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie: Thank you very much.

Has funding for those programs increased following the changes made to transfer payments between the federal and provincial governments?

Mr. Taylor Good: In terms of transfer payments, I'm not really in a position to answer that question. I don't know enough about it. However, I can say that the modernization of the Official Languages Act made reference to post-secondary education in its preamble. That's a major improvement. It will give post-secondary minority institutions, like the Faculté Saint-Jean, a little more flexibility.

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie: Thank you.

Are you confident that these programs will continue to evolve and strengthen the French-language skills of Canadians in Alberta?

Mr. Taylor Good: I'm sorry. Which programs are you referring to?

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie: I'm talking about programs at the Faculté Saint-Jean, generally.

Mr. Taylor Good: I think Campus Saint-Jean is growing. Based on my experience in education, programs are being developed and the outcomes are positive. Some work still needs to be done in terms of program delivery. We have to make sure that more courses are offered in French so that international and Canadian students who speak French only can take most of their courses in French.

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie: Thank you very much.

In your opinion, why is it important for the government to fund minority language educational institutions in the west and in Alberta?

I have an opinion on that, but I'd like to hear yours

Mr. Taylor Good: I don't have the latest figures with me, but we know that Alberta's francophone community is very big. That's obvious at Campus Saint-Jean, in the francophone neighbourhood of Bonnie Doon. A large number of community organizations serve the francophone and French immersion community.

Post-secondary education in a minority setting is essential, not only for our francophone minority communities in western Canada, but for everyone trying to learn French—I was one of them—and to correct the labour shortage affecting French teachers and health care staff, for instance.

That's why educational institutions like Campus Saint-Jean are critically important.

• (1645)

Mrs. Stephanie Kusie: What obstacles are preventing the programs from reaching the greatest number of students possible?

Mr. Taylor Good: That's an excellent question.

I think that a number of factors come into play. First, all the faculties want to expand their infrastructure to accommodate a larger student population.

Next, we have to find staff capable of teaching specialized subjects in French. That means we need funds to bring the staff we're looking for to Alberta.

Finally, I think the third factor is programming. We have to invest in level 300 and level 400 courses, in other words, third and fourth-year courses. These courses have to be available to students in French. As I mentioned earlier, education is the only program that offers that option for now. We have to make sure that arts and science students have the opportunity to take those third and fourth-year courses in French. Otherwise, we could lose these students if their only option is to take their courses in English, which would definitely pose a linguistic challenge.

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

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: Thank you, Mrs. Kusie and Mr. Good.

The next questions will come from the Liberals.

Mr. Iacono, you have six minutes.

Mr. Angelo Iacono (Alfred-Pellan, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to the witnesses for being here.

My questions are for both witnesses and require short answers.

How much federal funding does your institution receive for research each year?

Mr. LeBlanc, you may answer first.

Mr. Gino LeBlanc: We get very little, actually.

Mr. Angelo Iacono: How much does the institution receive?

Mr. Gino LeBlanc: The new structure set up by the Association francophone pour le savoir, Acfas, led by Thierry Drapeau, has been extremely helpful to us in obtaining research funding.

To my knowledge, federal funding for research in French is not very much. Research by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council is funded, but a lot of that research is done in English.

Mr. Angelo Iacono: It seems a little strange to hear that federal funding is not enough, yet we don't know how much it amounts to.

Mr. Good, do you have an amount in mind?

Mr. Taylor Good: I don't know the amount, but I would say that all the federal announcements I've attended concerned investments in infrastructure.

Mr. Angelo Iacono: That's fine.

My next question is also for both of you.

How much provincial funding does your institution receive for research each year?

Mr. Gino LeBlanc: Your question is a little vague, Mr. Iacono. Do you mean research in French?

Mr. Angelo Iacono: Yes.

Mr. Gino LeBlanc: Do you mean research on francophone communities done in French?

Mr. Angelo Iacono: That's right.

Mr. Gino LeBlanc: I'm not in a position to answer that question.

Mr. Angelo Iacono: Mr. Good, you have the floor.

Mr. Taylor Good: The Campus Saint-Jean report does not include these figures, because at the provincial level, the money is allocated to the institution. Since research funds are not distributed among faculties, I don't have the figures for Campus Saint-Jean.

Mr. Angelo Iacono: In your opinion, is there more university revenue for the English language than for the French language? Yes or no?

Mr. Gino LeBlanc: What do you mean by university revenue?

Mr. Angelo Iacono: It's the money you get for research from the federal government, whether it's for the English language or the

French language. It's money to encourage your professors to conduct research in French or in English.

Would you know about this?

Mr. Gino LeBlanc: Absolutely. As I was saying, there are measures in place, particularly in collaboration with Acfas, an organization you've probably dealt with. We set up an office to support research in French. Obviously, in a structure like Simon Fraser University's and in most ethics committees, for example, all this work is done mainly in English. The same goes for funding applications to the Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada, or NSERC, the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council, or SSHRC, and the health institutes. The Acfas project is therefore very promising. We support it, and we've already met to support our researchers here. There is research being done in French, at the international level.

You're asking me to give you figures. I could find you some. There are people who do research on language education, on French-language teaching. There are some figures, but I'm trying to pin down what you're referring to.

Are you thinking specifically about funding from the federal government?

Mr. Angelo Iacono: Exactly. We've asked other institutions the same question: How much money does the federal government give to institutions that do research, that offer students the opportunity to do research and complete master's degrees in French, for example?

If we hear that French is in decline but we don't know how much money you're investing or how much you receive from the federal government to support research in French, it's difficult to gauge what your needs are.

I will ask you my next question. Federal funding is important, but the provinces also need to get involved. In fact, federal funding must be accompanied by provincial funding.

Does the province give you less funding than it gives to institutions that serve the linguistic majority?

• (1650)

Mr. Gino LeBlanc: Definitely. Mr. Good, I didn't mean to interrupt you, but SSHRC used to have programs that supported minority communities. They were called CURAs, or Community-University Research Alliances, which no longer exist. That is a shame, because these programs worked really well.

SSHRC, to name just one organization, has programs aimed at indigenous communities. It seems to me that the federal government could participate in these programs, which are working well, with the provincial departments of post-secondary education, of course. The provinces have a role to play; if that's the point you wanted to make, I agree with you.

However, I think it's quite clear that federal research funding institutions aren't doing enough to support research in French outside Quebec. The Association francophone pour le savoir, Acfas, has published a report from an extremely well-done study showing all the shortcomings in the area of research.

Mr. Angelo Iacono: Is Canada's current system of post-secondary institutions adequately meeting the needs of francophone communities outside Quebec?

Mr. Taylor Good: I would say yes, to a certain extent, in terms of infrastructure. On that point, that's certainly true. Then again, I would say that there are still some challenges when it comes to Campus Saint-Jean and its students.

Now let's talk about translation, for example. Since Faculté Saint-Jean is part of an English-speaking university, most services pertaining to student loans and top-up grants for both foreign and Canadian students are offered entirely in English. It seems to me that the federal government is a key pillar in ensuring the translation of documents related to these services. This would provide access to our French-speaking students, and especially to francophones who don't have the language skills needed to fill out these forms in English. I think this is essential.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Good and Mr. Iacono.

The next few questions will be asked by the Bloc Québécois. The second vice-chair of this committee, Mr. Beaulieu, has the floor for six minutes.

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

I also want to thank our guests.

I will start with a question for Mr. Good.

We know that, for several generations, teaching French was completely banned by law in Alberta. This resulted in a very significant assimilation of francophones in Alberta.

In your view, has the Alberta government acknowledged that fact? Has some form of redress been made or is in the process of being made?

Mr. Taylor Good: I would say yes, to a certain extent. The provincial government recognizes its obligations and the role it must play in correcting the wrongs of the past, if I can put it in those terms. I would also say that the provincial government continues to be involved in consultations, in events to further enrich francophone culture, the French-speaking culture in Alberta, and enhance the vitality of the community.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: In 2020, financial and administrative measures taken against Campus Saint-Jean gave rise to a whole movement to defend the campus.

Campus Saint-Jean is the only French-language post-secondary institution in Alberta. I don't think it offers all study programs. It provides some. How do you explain these financial measures, among others, that forced organizations like the Association canadienne-française de l'Alberta, or ACFA, to launch the "Save Saint-Jean" campaign?

How is it that you've been reduced to resorting to such tactics?

• (1655)

Mr. Taylor Good: You're talking about the ACFA initiative aimed at the provincial government and the University of Alberta.

I'm not quite sure how to answer your question. Could you maybe rephrase it?

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: I find it astounding that the only campus offering French-language education in Alberta has to fight these kinds of battles to secure its existence. Even the ACFA has drafted a brief stating that underfunding is jeopardizing French-language post-secondary education in Alberta. In my opinion, this is not exactly a sign that the Alberta government is willing to correct a wrong.

Mr. Taylor Good: When it comes to investments, I think the student body would agree with that statement. However, I would also like to point out that, during that period, especially before the pandemic, this was a provincial-level situation. At that time, Campus Saint-Jean depended on federal funding to make ends meet. At the time, the measures in question prevented all institutions from using federal funding to get through the pandemic.

I would also add that, during this time, provincial and federal investments were not exactly at their peak. That's not quite the right word, but let's just say they weren't at the level we wanted. In my view, it's only now that we're receiving this federal investment, which enables us in some ways to dig ourselves out of the situation we faced then.

Now, the challenge is to ensure that this funding is provided on an ongoing basis by the federal government, as a pillar and key partner.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: Mr. LeBlanc, you said that, in British Columbia, the institutional network of minority francophone associations was unable to meet the demand for post-secondary programs in French. What's the current situation? Has it improved or not?

Mr. Gino LeBlanc: Obviously, if I could offer more programs, I could attract more people. There are limits, unfortunately.

I'd like to offer a criminology program in French. I can't. I'd like to offer science programs in French. I can't. I can't afford it. However, as I told you earlier, we do what we can in education and the social sciences.

The fact that post-secondary education is a provincial jurisdiction is a key factor, but we gain absolutely nothing. In fact, I would say that what makes this file thorny is that we are dependent on tensions and arguments over the issue of federal or provincial responsibility. It's the responsibility of one or the other. That in itself is a tricky problem.

What we think is important is working together. Under the act, the federal government has a mandate, a responsibility, to ensure the development and vitality of official language minorities and to work towards that. We want to work with the federal government. We want to work with the Province of British Columbia. Right now, it's not perfect. We have a good relationship with the Ministry of Education. We want to move forward and increase our program offering.

Basically, we're fighting against the English language, against assimilation. We're one of the tools for providing the continuum of education in French, and we're part of that effort.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: You said earlier that most of your funding comes from the OLEP. Is that correct?

Mr. Gino LeBlanc: Precisely. It's a federal-provincial agreement. Since 2004, most of our funding has come from the official languages in education program.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. LeBlanc.

Thank you, Mr. Beaulieu.

The last questions in this round will come from the western gateway, with the NDP representative.

Ms. Ashton, you have the floor for six minutes.

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

Welcome to the witnesses.

As you know, the purpose of this study is not only to learn about the situation of post-secondary education in French, but also to make recommendations to the federal government on how to improve it.

Last week, the Association des collèges et universités de la francophonie canadienne, or ACUFC, made a presentation to the committee. Its request was clear, namely the creation of an additional \$80 million fund for stable core funding. Do you agree with that request?

I'll ask Mr. LeBlanc first and then Mr. Good.

Mr. Gino LeBlanc: Yes, I think that's one of the tools.

As I said, it's not just a question of money, but money is also the sinews of war. The current government promised us that it would double that amount; unfortunately, when the Department of Finance came and put a figure on the post-secondary education envelope, we didn't get the amount announced. Across Canada, that works out to \$30 million a year for all post-secondary institutions from Acadia to British Columbia. It's not a lot of money, but we'll take it.

The action plan contains other elements, such as the teacher recruitment and retention fund. I haven't talked a lot about teacher training so far. This teacher recruitment and retention envelope will allow us to play an important role in teacher training, and that counts. That's a very positive thing.

Finally, yes, we fully support the ACUFC's recommendation. There was a promise to double that envelope, but it didn't happen. That would certainly be a game changer in terms of our ability to deliver a much broader range of programs.

• (1700)

Ms. Niki Ashton: Thank you.

Mr. Good, do you have anything to add?

Mr. Taylor Good: I would say pretty much the same thing.

It's one of the tools available to post-secondary institutions in minority communities, but it's not the only one. That said, it would be beneficial to their development.

It's also essential to always listen to students and consult them. We have a lot of contact with the jurisdictions, and that's important, but it's critical to hear the student voice as well.

Investments in infrastructure must also be maintained. Last month, the federal government announced nearly \$2 million for the campus and its buildings, and for the creation of a program for job seekers. It will be great and essential for Campus Saint-Jean.

Ms. Niki Ashton: Okay.

Mr. LeBlanc, you talked about the education continuum. As part of this study, I think it's very important to discuss the labour shortage in education. I know the situation in British Columbia is dire. Waiting lists for French immersion are very long, and there's a shortage of teachers. This is a reality that we're also experiencing in Manitoba. According to the friends and families who live there, people want to have their children educated in French through immersion, but they can't do it.

Can you tell us how your programs address this labour shortage? What is the connection between what you do and the importance of adequate and stable funding for your institution?

Mr. Gino LeBlanc: Thank you. That's an excellent question.

I don't know if you've heard from other witnesses from British Columbia, but I would remind you that there are 55,000 French immersion students there. That's quite something. Almost 10% of students with English as their mother tongue are in French immersion. In addition, the Conseil scolaire francophone de la Colombie-Britannique, the CSF, has 5,500 students.

The school system needs more francophone teachers, teachers' assistants and staff in all specialties. Simon Fraser University, like all universities, gives us seats to train teachers. We train some 40 teachers in French for the French school system, meaning for immersion programs or for the Conseil scolaire francophone de la Colombie-Britannique. However, we could do more. Our colleagues at the University of British Columbia are also doing some training, and our colleagues at the University of Victoria have just started a small program of six or seven graduates.

The key here is to retain those people in our system. We can train them, but we also have to retain them afterwards. For our part, federal and provincial funding allows us to provide initial training, that is to say training that makes it possible to become a tenured teacher, but we could do more.

We also do professional development. Once teachers have integrated into the system, we have to make sure they have the tools and teaching materials they need to work in French and adapt the British Columbia school program adequately in French. In addition, we must ensure that the priorities of the Ministry of Education can be achieved in French. So at Simon Fraser University, with the help of federal and provincial resources, we play a very important role in supporting the entire francophone school system.

Furthermore, we also go abroad. We have a program called dual training. We recruit people from Europe, hoping that they will immigrate to Canada and teach in French in British Columbia. Other institutions do this as well, particularly in Acadia; so does Campus Saint-Jean.

We're trying all kinds of strategies. Ms. Ashton, the deputy minister of education in British Columbia told me a few years ago that he could hire 250 teachers overnight, but that everyone already had a job.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. LeBlanc.

Thank you, Ms. Ashton. There were only five seconds left.

We'll now begin another round of questions.

Mr. Dalton, you have the floor for five minutes.

• (1705)

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

You represent institutions that are very close to my heart. My father studied at Campus Saint-Jean in the 1940s. I also have two sisters, a brother and nieces who took courses there. Several members of my family have gone there. As for me, I have two degrees from Simon Fraser University: a bachelor's degree in history and in French, as well as a master's degree. So it's very important to me. In addition, my daughter took the Office of Francophone and Francophile Affairs, or OFFA, program, which greatly impressed her. OFFA and Simon Fraser University are very important to our francophone community.

Mr. LeBlanc said there were 50,000 immersion students, if I'm not mistaken—

Mr. Gino LeBlanc: There are 55,000.

Mr. Marc Dalton: Okay.

It's already increased by 5,000 people in a few minutes, by 10%. That's very impressive. It's essential that this progress continue and that it not end with immersion.

Mr. LeBlanc, you talked a little bit about government funding. You said that the agreements entered into under the official languages in education program, or OLEP, lasted only one or two years and that they should be longer.

Can you speak to the importance of having more stable funding?

Mr. Gino LeBlanc: Thank you for your question, Mr. Dalton.

Let's take a step back. We're taking part in a societal project that involves having a francophone society across Canada. We, the post-secondary institutions, are part of the education continuum, so

we have a role to play. Twenty years ago, we began funding institutions through the OLEP and action plans. Everyone here knows that it takes four or five years to obtain a bachelor's degree, two or three years to obtain a master's degree and three or four years to obtain a doctorate.

When you offer a program like the French cohort at Simon Fraser University, where your child studied, you have to hire associate professors, and those contracts are renewed. For there to be a student life, we want programming spread out over five or ten years. So we have to start thinking about post-secondary education in French in a minority setting, just as we think about the school system, francophone school boards and kindergarten. This is a multi-year deployment. We can't think that a bachelor's degree in French is a five-year project and then simply evaluate it and close the project.

As I said earlier, we have to take a leap of faith or make some kind of commitment to SFU. In fact, very concretely, committee members, it's April 15 and I have no more money. We've exhausted the funds that were granted to us under the OLEP, because the transitional year ended on March 31. SFU is saying that it will receive funding retroactively.

That's just one example. I'm not complaining, but this creates instability that makes it extremely difficult to plan post-secondary programming in French.

So let's be a little more serious. Let's try to put in place a national action plan for the entire education continuum. I think it will yield results.

Mr. Marc Dalton: We've long had a shortage of teachers in French as a second language and French immersion programs. Are student numbers increasing? Do we have the capacity to train them? Is there not enough money?

What can you tell us about that? Also, what about the importance of international students in your programs?

Mr. Gino LeBlanc: I'll answer the question, and I'll let Mr. Good speak as well on behalf of the Faculté Saint-Jean. Of course, the province gives us a certain number of spaces, so the number of students we can accept is limited. This year, the number is a little higher.

In concrete terms, because of the pandemic, the situation in the education sector has been difficult. I think the teaching profession needs to be bolstered. I've seen the figures for all post-secondary institutions, and the challenges are the same, whether on the francophone or anglophone side. However, I think the sector is growing. Most importantly, we intervene once the teachers are in the system. We had a high attrition rate and lost a lot of French teachers in the English program. They didn't want to stay there because they felt isolated. We're trying to work with a 360-degree or comprehensive approach to ensure that these people stay and develop the program in French.

Of course, we could do more if we had more resources. There's no doubt that there are gaps, a shortage and an insufficient capacity at the moment to train teachers at the post-secondary level in French.

• (1710)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. LeBlanc and Mr. Dalton.

Mr. Serré, you have the floor for five minutes.

Mr. Marc Serré (Nickel Belt, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'd also like to thank the two witnesses who are here today.

Mr. Good, you presented students from a perspective that is very helpful to us today.

Thank you, Mr. LeBlanc, for the important work you're doing at Simon Fraser University in British Columbia, work that is extremely important for the francophone community across the country.

As you mentioned, \$128 million was announced over four years, \$32 million of which is for post-secondary education. We know that's not enough. We also know that, in 2024-25, the first recommendation of all committee members will probably be to increase that amount to \$80 million, which probably won't be enough either, but at least it will be a start.

Mr. LeBlanc, thank you for mentioning recruitment in the action plans totalling \$4.1 billion over five years, which doubles the amount granted since 2015. I recently announced 40 student scholarships worth up to \$30,000 each for public and Catholic school boards across Canada to encourage students to study in French.

Mr. LeBlanc, my first question is for you. You mentioned the \$80 million, and on the second recommendation you suggested that you weren't at the table with the province and the federal government. You know that the Association des collèges et universités de la francophonie canadienne, or ACUFC, has indicated that it would set up a round table.

Can you contribute to the committee's thinking on the recommendations it should make to ensure that there is a good table focusing on post-secondary education? It's really not simple. Section 23 of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms deals with elementary and secondary education, not post-secondary education. At the federal level, we included post-secondary education in the act for the first time.

I'd like to hear what you have to say about the role that the provinces and educational institutions should play at the round table.

Mr. Gino LeBlanc: Thank you very much for your question.

Wasn't it also announced that funding would be doubled up north, in Sudbury? We were very pleased and remain optimistic. We hope that Treasury Board will review this funding.

I think Parliament should be given credit at this point, given that the modernization of the Official Languages Act includes post-secondary education. We don't yet know what that will look like, as public policy hasn't changed and neither have the programs. I believe the regulations will be developed around Part VII of the act and the obligation of federal institutions.

Subsections 41(1), 41(3) and 41(6) specify that post-secondary education is part of the continuum. I think this is a significant and very important step forward. Then, the action plan provides for money, new budget envelopes. That's also important.

In fact, where we are absent, and where it's a bit odd, is in the official languages in education program, the OLEP. Not only does the OLEP require a memorandum of understanding, but it must also be approved by ten provinces, three territories and the federal government. I'm not telling you anything new when I say this: Mr. Samson knows this by heart, you too, Mr. Serré, as does everyone around the table. As some provinces are less happy than others, things are slowing down, while other provinces would be ready to move forward. I think we have to review the way we want to structure this envelope. I'm not sure the MOU is a good tool. I think it's putting the brakes on. However, it certainly plays a role in regulating public policy.

Let's now talk about bilateral agreements. None of us, neither the Université de l'Ontario français, the Université de Moncton nor the Faculté Saint-Jean, are at the table. If we have a good relationship with our respective ministries of education, that's fine. That's the case in British Columbia. Otherwise, if things go wrong with a government that doesn't like francophones or is not open to the francophonie, it can be extremely complicated.

Mr. Good, perhaps you could comment on your absence from the provincial table.

Mr. Marc Serré: I only have about a minute left.

Mr. LeBlanc, could you submit specific recommendations for research and tell us what the federal government can do to encourage people at the doctoral and master's levels?

Mr. Good, thank you for sharing your point of view with us. According to what you told us, you had six bilingual programs and three in French, but the Alberta government made drastic cuts in 2020 by reducing the number of French-language programs to just one. You mentioned a \$13 million agreement involving the federal government, the province and the university.

Is the number of courses back to what it was in 2020, when you were a student?

• (1715)

Mr. Taylor Good: The number of courses hasn't returned to what it was in 2020, but new programs have been added, such as a master's degree in education sciences and a doctorate in transdisciplinary studies. The number of courses has still not returned to what it was in 2020.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Good and Mr. Serré.

Mr. Beaulieu, you have the floor for two and a half minutes.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: Mr. LeBlanc, you said that most of your funding comes from the OLEP, so you have to keep a close eye on all the negotiations related to the new memoranda of understanding between the federal government and the provinces. I believe the last one was ending in 2023.

Is there a new memorandum of understanding coming? What's the status of the work?

You said earlier that you weren't consulted enough because of the bilateral agreements. Overall, what needs to be improved so that it meets your needs more closely?

Mr. Gino LeBlanc: That's a very good question. In my opinion, we're touching on a point that could generate some interesting recommendations from your committee.

I wouldn't say that the province, namely British Columbia, doesn't consult us. Post-secondary institutions are consulted. This is true of Collège Éducentre and ours as well. At the federal level, we have a good relationship with the Department of Canadian Heritage by default.

However, there is a government-to-government negotiation afterwards in which we really don't participate. The negotiation takes place without us. We then hope that our Deputy Minister of Education will defend the interests of our university and those of the Conseil scolaire francophone de la Colombie-Britannique.

This is where community engagement comes in. We can imagine a governance model that isn't exclusively governmental and only involving the federal and provincial governments, where not all partners are at the table. I know we're not an elected government. On the other hand, I think there could be some creativity.

ACUFC's recommendation is excellent. It talks about a national consultation table, in addition to the existing one. Mr. Samson alluded to it earlier, in the presence of the other witnesses. I think it's relevant, too. So we're talking about a national table on post-secondary education. I think we could collaborate a great deal more. This idea has barely been discussed, but we could collaborate on a system in Western Canada, in Acadia, and so on.

There are a multitude of possibilities. Right now, the way we do things is a bit old-fashioned. We've been doing it for 20 years and it hasn't changed. I think we can come up with something else.

Mr. Mario Beaulieu: Please feel free to send us some of your ideas in writing. It could inform our recommendations.

I'd like to know if you have any teachers or students from Quebec.

How would you be affected if French continued to decline in Quebec?

Mr. Gino LeBlanc: Quebec is very important to us, because it's a francophone space on which we rely, whether in terms of pedagogy or reading material. Life in French in Canada needs Quebec. There's no doubt about that. But attracting people is difficult. Indeed, it's almost impossible to attract someone from Trois-Rivières to Simon Fraser University because of the cost of living, but also, simply, because of tuition fees. That's a challenge. That said, we do recruit on the teaching side, on the faculty side. You're right about that.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. LeBlanc. We will come back to that.

Ms. Ashton, you have two and a half minutes.

Ms. Niki Ashton: Thank you, Chair.

I'd like to come back to the labour shortage.

Mr. LeBlanc, you talked about the work you do in training and support. Not only recruitment, but also retention.

In your opinion, would stable and adequate funding for your institution from the federal government help you do your work, which contributes to the recruitment and retention of francophone teachers in your province?

Mr. Gino LeBlanc: The answer is yes. I'm sure your committee's research department will find studies from the Commissioner of Official Languages for you. The Canadian Association of Immersion Professionals, or CAIP, also comes to mind, as well as the University of British Columbia, which has done research on all the aspects that would enable us to retain francophones in a minority-language education system. There's some wonderful research out there that will no doubt provide inspiration.

As for whether stable, predictable and adequate funding would help us, that is certainly the case. After all, we're constantly applying for funding. We're also accountable, which I don't have a problem with. We submit reports with indicators. We're very good at that. The fact remains that we're talking about 24-month cycles here, whereas in reality, training a teacher is a four or five-year project. In that sense, I'd like to see funding that is multi-year, much more stable and predictable, that comes from the OLEP rather than temporary envelopes.

I remind you that the envelope for post-secondary education is indeed temporary. It is not guaranteed beyond 2028. One can imagine that governments won't dare abolish the OLEP, given that it's among their responsibilities. In my opinion, the situation would be much improved if the OLEP were truly enhanced, as has been much of the funding for community organizations in recent years.

• (1720)

Ms. Niki Ashton: Thank you.

Mr. Good, I'd like to ask you the same question. At Campus Saint-Jean, you're helping to alleviate the labour shortage in French immersion educational programs. Would stable, adequate and predictable funding help you maintain the work you're doing to address this labour shortage?

Mr. Taylor Good: The short answer is yes, absolutely. Funding is critical for retention.

On the other hand, I would also say that in Alberta, 43,000 students are enrolled in an immersion school and 122,000 are taking French as a second language courses. These are significant numbers. So the transition from high school to post-secondary is a really important issue.

Retention is indeed important at Campus Saint-Jean, but we also need to ensure that those seeking to become teachers have the opportunity to do so. Funding must therefore enable this too.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Good.

Thank you, Ms. Ashton. Your time is up.

There is enough time left for the Conservatives and Liberals to each have a three and half-minute round.

Mr. Godin, you have three and a half minutes.

Mr. Joël Godin: Thank you, Chair.

My question is for Mr. LeBlanc, but first, I'd like to compliment Mr. Good on his excellent French.

Mr. Good, it's inspiring to see young people like you speak French well and get involved. You know your file very well. Bravo!

Mr. LeBlanc, we haven't talked about access for those following an educational pathway from early childhood to post-secondary education.

A recent decision had an impact on post-secondary institutions. We heard testimony from the Association des collèges et universités de la francophonie canadienne last week regarding international students.

Will the student immigration decision have an effect on your institution?

Mr. Gino LeBlanc: This certainly affects us, as it does everyone else, although some other institutions may be more affected. We've had emergency meetings on this over the last few days, as you can imagine.

In my opinion, what is most shocking about this decision is that the Official Languages Act has just been modernized and a new Official Languages Action Plan launched. And yet a Minister of the Crown chooses to make a decision that is going to be downright

detrimental to French-language establishments. I think the Minister put up a lot of resistance to this argument. I thought it was a bit odd that he said post-secondary institutions wanted students at a discount. I think what we're really trying to do is make sure we have access to this "incubator," these foreign students who play a very important role in the country's francophonie, from Acadia to Western Canada.

We still find ourselves in an unstable situation because of the cap on the number of study permits issued to foreign students. I think we were caught by surprise, as leaders of post-secondary institutions. We're a little concerned that the federal government can simultaneously announce an update to the law and a new action plan and make a decision that's really going to hurt a lot of institutions.

Mr. Joël Godin: Economically speaking, does this cap have a real impact? Do we have enough people here in Canada to fill the available spots in your programs? Listening to you earlier, I understood that you had a shortage of teachers and that the spots in your programs seemed quite full.

Is this having a major impact, or are you able to fill the spots in your programs with students who went to high school in Canada?

The announcement was made in January, and we still have a few months to turn things around.

Have you explored the possibility of going out and recruiting high school students for next fall?

Mr. Gino LeBlanc: British Columbia has always been a province founded on immigration. As you've probably already heard, demographically speaking, French-speaking families aren't having enough children. So we're going to need francophone immigration in British Columbia and throughout French-speaking Canada.

In the case of teacher training, the process is extremely complex. It is regulated by a professional association that has important, but also very strict, criteria that must be followed. Finding a French-speaking teacher in Belgium, bringing them to British Columbia, training them, getting them accredited by the professional association, giving them the tools—all this is an important process that we follow, but it's not a gateway. It's not a direct link between the classroom in Europe and the classroom in British Columbia.

• (1725)

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Gino LeBlanc: It's one part of the solution.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. LeBlanc.

Before giving the floor to my colleague Mr. Samson for the next three and a half minutes, I'm going to encroach a little on his time.

Mr. LeBlanc, you spoke earlier about this fabled protocol, of which we hear very little.

You seemed to have ideas for templates, or perhaps suggestions, that could improve the way the report on this study is written.

Could you send them to us later, in writing, through our clerk, so that we can take a close look at them?

We often hear from university representatives about core funding, but we have yet to hear a proposal on how it should be delivered.

Should it be paid directly to institutions by the federal government through the provincial government as part of tripartite agreements, or come directly from the province?

What proposal would you like this committee to retain so that it can incorporate it into its report?

Moreover, Mr. Good, as Mr. Godin said—I'll say it again—you're quite good at your job. If you think you can add your two cents on these matters, I invite you to do so in writing. We'd really appreciate it. The invitation also extends to Mr. LeBlanc.

I now give the floor for the remaining two and a half minutes to my colleague Mr. Samson.

Mr. Darrell Samson: Thank you, Chair. Since you used up some of my three minutes, I don't have much time.

I'd still like to address you very quickly, Mr. LeBlanc, because you touched on a few things I'd like to come back to.

Twenty years ago, we didn't talk about a continuum of French-language studies. Only primary and secondary studies could be done in French, a mortal sin. We spent years clamouring for access to post-secondary studies in French and finally got it.

You referred to the Official Languages in Education Program, or OLEP, and I appreciate your comments on the subject.

In 2005, I became superintendent of a French-language school board. I met with representatives of the Department of Canadian Heritage, who told me that, in order to obtain funding, the process was generally like in the Meech Lake Accord: you need the agreement of seven provinces and 51% of the vote, and that I had no chance of succeeding. So “discretionary” slots had to be created.

I still want to raise the issue of bilateral funding.

You talked about relationships with the provinces, which is very important. In 2016–2017, the Fédération nationale des conseils scolaires francophones signed the Strategic Plan on French-Language Education.

This plan included, if I can put it this way, a simple obligation for the provinces to make sure they consult with provincial school

boards and highlight their priorities before establishing funding. Certain issues could then be addressed during the consultations. They were thus obliged to consult school boards to highlight their priorities in order to help them build an action plan under the new OLEP.

Since you referred to it, can you tell me if this is how things are done? Perhaps we should reopen this issue to allow access to the provinces and territories?

Mr. Gino LeBlanc: In the case of British Columbia, things are going well so far.

As you know, the situation is not as easy for Ontario and Alberta, but I wasn't speaking on their behalf.

So, in that sense, we need to find mechanisms that allow us all to participate in consultations throughout the process, and not just for one afternoon.

Mr. Good could also answer your question.

Mr. Taylor Good: I would say the same thing.

It's not that simple here in Alberta, especially since the position of Parliamentary Secretary for Francophonie was eliminated. That role was crucial to the rounds and discussions.

So I absolutely agree with Mr. LeBlanc.

The Chair: I'd like to thank everyone, including the witnesses.

Before concluding, I would like to acknowledge the presence of our tireless supporters Mr. Deltell and Mr. Maguire, who attended this meeting of the Standing Committee on Official Languages, the best committee in town.

Mr. Good, our colleague Ms. Kusie told you earlier that another MP among us attended your institution before being elected.

A fellow MP who attended your very institution became Minister for Official Languages, and we could be forgetting others.

So the Standing Committee on Official Languages may be sending you a cryptic message, as you wrap you up your final year of university.

Dear witnesses, thank you again very much. This has been a fascinating discussion for all involved. Please take the time to write to us. We would very much like to get the additional information that you did not have time to send us, as we draft our report.

Thank you all very much for taking part in this exercise.

The meeting is adjourned.

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