



HOUSE OF COMMONS  
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES  
CANADA

44th PARLIAMENT, 1st SESSION

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# Standing Committee on Science and Research

EVIDENCE

**NUMBER 084**

Thursday, May 2, 2024

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Chair: Mr. Lloyd Longfield





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• (1140)

[English]

**The Chair (Mr. Lloyd Longfield (Guelph, Lib.)):** I call the meeting to order.

Welcome to meeting number 84 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Science and Research.

Before I begin, I'll just remind all members and other meeting participants that the room has been reconfigured with some preventative measures.

To prevent disruptive and potentially harmful audio feedback incidents that can cause injuries, all in-person participants are reminded to keep their earpieces away from all microphones at all times.

As indicated in the communiqué from the Speaker to all members on Monday, April 29, another measure that has been implemented is that all earpieces have been replaced by a model that greatly reduces the probability of audio feedback. The new earpieces are black in colour, whereas the former ones were grey. Use only the black, approved earpiece.

By default, all unused earpieces will be unplugged at the start of a meeting. When you're not using your earpiece, please place it face down on the middle of the sticker that's provided for this purpose, which is on the table in front of you.

Consult the cards on the table for guidelines to prevent audio feedback incidents.

The room layout has been adjusted to increase the distance between microphones and reduce the chance of feedback from an ambient earpiece. These measures are in place so we can conduct our business without interruption and to protect the health and safety of all participants, including our interpreters. Thank you for your cooperation.

Today's meeting is in a hybrid format. We do have one member on Zoom. If you lose interpretation, please let me know right away and we will suspend until we get it restored.

Before you speak, wait until I recognize you by name and then unmute yourself. When you're not speaking, please keep your microphone on mute.

I'll remind you that all comments by members should be addressed through the chair. With regard to the speaking list, the clerk and I will do our best to maintain the consolidated order of speak-

ing for all members, whether they're participating virtually or in person.

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(3)(i) and the motions adopted by the committee on Tuesday, January 30, and Thursday, February 15, the committee is resuming its study of the distribution of federal government funding among Canada's post-secondary institutions.

It's now my pleasure to welcome, from Acfas, Martin Maltais, president, and Sophie Montreuil, executive director.

From the Canadian Federation of Students, we have Gishleine Oukouomi, national treasurer.

Each individual has five minutes for their remarks.

We'll start off with Mr. Maltais or Madame Montreuil.

[Translation]

**Mr. Martin Maltais (President, Acfas – Association francophone pour le savoir):** Good morning Mr. Chair and members of the committee.

My name is Martin Maltais. I'm the president of Acfas, the Association francophone pour le savoir, and a professor of finance and educational policy at the Université du Québec à Rimouski. I am also a member of the Laboratoire interdisciplinaire de recherche sur l'enseignement supérieur.

With me today is Sophie Montreuil, the executive director of Acfas. We are honoured to be able to contribute to the committee's work on the distribution of federal government funding among Canada's post-secondary institutions.

Over the past one hundred years, Acfas has made an outstanding contribution to the transmission of knowledge in French, and to the advancement of the francophone research community in the French-speaking world.

Acfas has six regional offices across Canada outside of Quebec. We contribute directly to the vitality of research in French and to the promotion of knowledge across Canada. We contribute on an everyday basis to the prosperity and prestige of our country.

I'd like to provide a bit of background at the outset. In view of the new Official Languages Act and the new positive measures in part VII to promote science and research in French in Canada, our association can only reiterate how important it is for Canada to mine the expertise of its two major research language communities to find ways to address the major challenges of society and promote our country and its researchers.

We agree with the recommendations made in the report from the advisory panel on the federal research support system, known as the Bouchard report, and in your committee's report on research and scientific publication in French. We also welcome the additional funding for granting agencies announced by the government in its most recent budget, and the eagerly awaited increase in scholarships awarded to graduate and post-graduate students.

Right off the bat, the goal of your study is interesting for its use of the word "between", which introduces the concept of a gap, or space, within a group of components. There is indeed a major gap between Canadian post-secondary institutions in terms of their capacity to receive research funding from the government of Canada.

Let's look at a few facts. In 2020–2021, 74% of federal government funding for University research was shared by 15 institutions, which accounted for only 52% of faculty and 59% of the graduate student community; 77% of these public funds went to the 20% of researchers who were already receiving the most funding. Among these universities, only two are francophone, and only one bilingual. The 12 anglophone universities in the U15 group share approximately 60% of Canadian government funding, even though they have just over 40% of faculty and graduate students.

The two francophone universities share just over 10%, and account for 8% of faculty, and 14% of graduate students in Canada. These two universities are definitely more productive in terms of graduates.

Also in 2021, 2.9% of funding from the three granting agencies went to colleges. Without abandoning the excellence criterion...

• (1145)

[English]

**The Chair:** I'm sorry to interrupt.

The bells are ringing. Do we have consent to continue with the presentations?

Okay. Thank you.

Please continue. You have about a minute and 10 seconds.

[Translation]

**Mr. Martin Maltais:** Okay, thank you.

Without abandoning the excellence criterion, the committee should look into new mechanisms for distributing funding, particularly from the standpoint of the Official Languages Act, which acknowledges that French is in a minority position in Canada and North America. This requires the introduction of positive measures. The language factor should be among the considerations and options used by the Canadian government to allocate funding for university research. A better linguistic distribution can only be achieved by giving more support to small and medium-sized universities.

The new distribution of federal funding should factor in principles that Acfas considers essential to an effective research ecosystem. These principles include promoting researchers; promoting basic research; acknowledging the identity-building and cultural mandate of local universities and universities not located in major cities, which are essential to the vitality of francophone minority

communities; equitable funding for members of the francophone Canadian scientific community; and the need to have francophone international students in numbers that exceed the relative demographic weight of francophones in Canada, particularly at the higher levels of education.

Thank you for your attention.

[English]

**The Chair:** That's great.

Now we have Ms. Oukouomi for five minutes.

[Translation]

**Ms. Gishleine Oukouomi (National Treasurer, Canadian Federation of Students):** Thank you.

Mr. Chair and members of the committee, thank you for this opportunity to speak about the problems faced by students at post-secondary educational institutions in Canada.

My name is Gishleine, and I am the national treasurer of the Canadian Federation of Students. We represent some 530,000 students from 63 student unions across Canada, including 20 graduate student unions.

I'd like to begin by drawing attention to the tireless work of graduate students in Canada, because it's thanks to their work and the efforts of groups like Support Our Science and the Canadian Association for Graduate Studies that changes were made in the 2024 budget.

I would also like to thank all the members of this committee for the leadership they demonstrated in putting pressure on the government to ensure that graduate students are no longer paid at a level that keeps them at the poverty line.

These new investments in research and graduate students constitute a first step in the right direction to demonstrate clearly that Canada wants to remain competitive internationally, and they also show how important it is to introduce significant measures to modernize research and fill gaps in the existing research infrastructure.

We applaud the measures taken in the budget, but that doesn't mean we have to stop there. We must continue to pursue the momentum generated by these investments to ensure not only that graduate students can pursue their studies, but also that they get the support they need to avoid having to make a choice between continuing their education and just having a life.

We are aware of the fact that grants from the three granting agencies have been increased, but Canada still ranks 26th among OECD members in terms of the percentage of people pursuing a graduate education. And since 2010, Canada has experienced a significant drop in the number of researchers compared to other developed countries.

Our organization would like the government to provide funding that would enable universities to address the realities of students in various areas, including the number of years of study, reducing the burden on student associations, for example when funding for doctoral students ceases after four years. Nobody completes a Ph.D. in four years in Canada. The average length of time is six years.

We would like funding to be understood not as research funding, but rather funding for researchers, by which we mean compassionate funding that would alleviate their financial straits and factor in their diet, health, accommodation and transportation needs. Such needs are often much more serious for graduate students.

Introducing measures like indexing post-graduate and postdoctoral grants to inflation would make Canada more competitive internationally.

It's also important to ensure that public funds allocated to universities, particularly to those in the U15 group, are not only equitable, but also proportionate to funding for small and medium-sized universities, with due regard to research in the natural sciences, health sciences and especially the social sciences, which are often short-changed.

We would also like Canada to provide enough funding to keep universities from having to depend so much on foreign students to obtain the funding they need to stay afloat.

Lastly, we would like Canada to invest in a manner that is consistent with the Official Languages Act and thereby contribute to the vitality of official language minority communities. We would like events like science fairs, which encourage scientific research at the high school level, to be developed and funded at that level to support research not only in graduate studies, but in particular at the undergraduate level. There's a lot of talk of research at the higher levels, but not nearly often enough about people with bachelor's degrees who are interested in research.

We therefore need a bold strategy to eliminate inequalities in the system, a strategy that would provide equitable support to aspiring graduate students and the same opportunities as their peers, regardless of their geographical location or the size of their institution.

• (1150)

Additional financial support for students at small and medium-sized universities would not only lead to more diverse and innovative research, but also contribute to local economies, which would benefit enormously from the availability of talented new researchers.

[English]

**The Chair:** I'm sorry, but I'll have to call it there. We're over time.

I'd like to go to four five-minute rounds, if you guys are okay with that. I see agreement.

Okay, let's start with Mr. Soroka, please, for five minutes.

**Mr. Gerald Soroka (Yellowhead, CPC):** Thank you, Mr. Chair, and to the witnesses.

I'll start off with Ms. Oukouomi. You brought up housing and the crisis that many students are struggling to find affordable accommodation.

What insights can you provide on the extent of this issue among the student population, and what immediate steps do you believe could be taken to alleviate the housing challenges for students?

• (1155)

[Translation]

**Ms. Gishleine Oukouomi:** Thank you for your question.

We've noticed that most U15 group universities are in urban centres. The first problem students face is therefore housing, because most of the students who want to study at these large universities have to cohabit. They have to leave their parents' home and find somewhere new to live. This sometimes happens because the only programs to which they have access, and for which university assistance is available, are institutions of the U15 group, which once again are all in urban centres.

Furthermore, most students don't have the means to live comfortably with the funding available to them. In a city like Ottawa, it costs approximately \$1,200 per month for a room in shared accommodation. Students therefore use most of their research funding to cope with the cost of living. They don't have the means to live suitably and pay for their rent and food.

If you speak with the student associations, you'll hear that at the end of each year, our student aid funds have run dry. This affects every campus. We can't handle the number of requests we get from students. Even if they have financial support from the universities, they don't always manage to make ends meet because of current circumstances. It's even worse for graduate students, because most of them are also parents. It's therefore impossible for them to live in shared accommodation. They need a house, which is even more expensive. As a result, their financial needs are enormous. That's more or less where things stand right now.

So to begin with, in terms of what has to be done to remedy the problems, provinces like Ontario could follow Quebec's lead. A room on the campus of the Université du Québec à Rimouski, l'UQAR, costs \$380 per month. At the University of Ottawa, it's \$1,000 or more. That really affects the student experience.

As for the cost of living, in provinces like Quebec, once students have completed their courses, their tuition fees are reduced, which leaves them with more money in their pockets. That's not the case in the other provinces. At the graduate level, after the first year, for example, Ph.D. students don't have any more courses, but they continue to pay full tuition fees.

If arrangements were made for students to pay only what's required for their circumstances, it could reduce the burden of high tuition fees, and student grants could be used for their actual purpose, which is to support students and enable them to focus on their research.

[English]

**Mr. Gerald Soroka:** Okay. Am I...?

**The Chair:** You have about 40 seconds left.

**Mr. Gerald Soroka:** I'll ask the question, and she can reply back in writing, then.

In light of the rising inflation, particularly in sectors critical to students such as food and housing, how do you see these affecting student budgets and financial planning? Have there been notable changes in students' spending patterns or financial stress levels due to inflation?

**The Chair:** Actually, I'm sorry, Mr. Soroka. You have another minute and 10 seconds.

**Mr. Gerald Soroka:** Oh, then you have a minute to answer, so be brief, please.

[Translation]

**Ms. Gishleine Oukouomi:** If you want a true indicator of how inflation has changed consumption habits, just look at the food banks on campuses. Many students who had never gone to a food bank before were forced to do so because of inflation. It's also worth looking at the data on the number of student evictions resulting from inflation.

We have student rights centres on campuses and most of the student unions we represent provide legal services. In the past, they were mainly helping students with their income tax returns. Recently, however, they've been helping students who can't pay their rent and are threatened with eviction. This means coming up with urgent solutions to find accommodation for them. This shows just how seriously students have been affected by inflation.

As for budget planning, you are no doubt aware that a student grant...

[English]

**The Chair:** I'm sorry. We'll have to call it at that. Thank you for getting that in. You can always give us more in writing, if you'd like to.

We'll go to Ms. Bradford for five minutes, please.

**Ms. Valerie Bradford (Kitchener South—Hespeler, Lib.):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you so much to our witnesses who have travelled here to appear in person and give us their expert testimony.

My question will be directed to Dr. Maltais.

On April 18, Céline Poncelin de Raucourt of the Université du Québec told the committee:

Since 2004, the share of total research funding granted by the federal government to francophone institutions has been declining. Francophone researchers now receive a percentage of the funding that is smaller than their demographic

weight. For Canada to maintain the vitality of all of its communities, it is imperative that more funding be provided to those institutions.

The question is this. What are the effects of the concentration of research funding on francophone institutions, particularly in minority settings?

The question is for whomever of you wants to take that on.

• (1200)

[Translation]

**Mr. Martin Maltais:** I couldn't hear the interpretation properly.

**Ms. Sophie Montreuil (Executive Director, Acfas – Association francophone pour le savoir):** I'll make a start and you can then join in with further details.

Some key numbers clearly show that access to research funding is inequitable certain institutions—the small and medium-sized universities—and for faculty. It's absolutely clear. Language, although not the only factor, contributes significantly to the unequal allocation of funding for research at small and medium-sized universities, and for francophone researchers. A researcher who wants to do research in French at an anglophone or bilingual institution, doesn't have access to the same services in support of their research applications and ends up abandoning the idea of submitting an application. That means that the university in question is depriving itself of some of the funding available for research in French. Many francophone researchers work at small institutions where there are fewer professors and hence smaller budgets, and where less funding is available from the granting agencies. To obtain funding—and I'm not joking here—the more money a university already has to fund research, the more it will receive. The less it has, the less likely it is to receive more.

This scenario is particularly true in the francophone research community, especially at small and medium-sized institutions. That's what Ms. Céline Poncelin de Raucourt said in the brief to the Université du Québec network, and she probably explained it better than I did on the basis of the numbers you referred to.

[English]

**Ms. Valerie Bradford:** Thank you.

What recommendations would you make to the government and granting agencies to improve the situation of francophone institutions?

[Translation]

**Mr. Martin Maltais:** If you were to ask us where improvements might be made, I would say it's obvious that something has to be done that would give us an advantage. Money is needed. We are in a research reinvestment phase. It's an opportunity to come up with ground rules that would be more beneficial to small and medium-sized universities and French-language universities across Canada.

What's at issue is the country's collective wealth. If all the best paid and most stimulating jobs require a university degree, often at the graduate or postgraduate level, the country's wealth is also tied to that. But the francophone population of approximately 9 million out of Canada's total population of 41 million is under-represented in terms of research, research funding and the number of graduate students.

That being the case, it's obvious that part of Canada's population is condemned to a lower level of economic wealth than the other part of the population unless something is done to change this state of affairs, which is currently structural.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Okay, thank you.

Monsieur Blanchette-Joncas, you have five minutes, please.

● (1205)

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Maxime Blanchette-Joncas (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, BQ):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Maltais, in your address, you gave a very clear picture of the research funding imbalance in Canada and said that it put francophones at a disadvantage, and even amounted to a form of discrimination against them.

I'll give you the following example. In Quebec, where most francophones in Canada live, some anglophone universities, although they are not part of a linguistic minority, receive more funding than the francophone universities. That doesn't necessarily make sense.

Quebec's majority francophone population needs funding for its research.

If we compare that situation to the way things stand in New Brunswick and Alberta, the Université de Moncton and Campus Saint-Jean find themselves in the same minority context, but receive far less funding.

How do you, as someone here to represent French-speaking researchers, explain that?

**Mr. Martin Maltais:** I believe the main reason for the imbalance is the funding model.

The university environment certainly focuses on excellence, and no one can challenge that excellence is essential in higher education.

However, excellence alone is not always enough. A critical mass of high-level researchers who can conduct their research in their respective languages is also essential.

It is therefore a dual issue. When 74% of Canadian government research grants go to 15 universities attended by barely half the country's students, the other half are condemned to lesser infrastructures and capacities.

And it's the regions, and the small and medium-sized universities in Canada that are often affected, which constitutes a major problem. You can't just say that people will always head for the major

centres to continue their education. A quality and comparable university experience is needed across the country.

Not only that, but the situation is even more skewed in French-language universities. When you realize that of these 15 universities, two are French-language institutions and happen to be more successful in educating master's and doctoral students than the 13 English-language universities—which receive approximately 60% of Canadian government research grants—the language problem stands out.

Once it is acknowledged that the French language is linguistically disadvantaged, then it's impossible to simply address one aspect at a time.

Action that will have a positive impact on Quebec and on all francophone communities in Canada is needed.

Allow me to repeat that the issue is to create more collective economic wealth. Concentrating resources will not achieve the best outcomes. Excellence can only take you so far.

At a certain point, if all the money goes into the same pot, growth becomes impossible. What's needed is excellence surrounded by a critical mass of talent and skill. That's the key.

**Mr. Maxime Blanchette-Joncas:** Thank you.

You spoke about attracting excellence. Excellence is something that comes from individuals, not institutions.

Would you agree that the Canadian research funding system is currently targeting excellence in institutions, most of which are anglophone?

Research funding is therefore concentrated in the anglophone network, particularly among the universities that are members of the U15 Group of Canadian Research Universities.

As you just pointed out, 13 of these 15 universities are anglophone.

What needs to be done to achieve a more effective distribution of research funding to the small and medium-sized francophone universities to prevent francophones from having to exile themselves to the mainly anglophone higher education network that receives most of Canada's research funding?

**Mr. Martin Maltais:** It's not an easy question to answer.

I'll try to be brief.

While it's true that individuals are the bearers of quality and excellence, they develop in a specific context, and institutions are part of it. It's an undeniable equation.

That said, I'll describe the equation's corollary.

A colleague of mine called Michel Umbriaco used to compare universities to a symphony orchestra. He would say that the more investment a university receives for research, the higher the quality of the music it plays. When all is said and done, quality is not really infinite. The same is true of a university's research capacity.

At some point, the allocation of funds needs to be revisited. How to get to that point? First of all, a share of the money—at the top of our list we would refer to the amount required for research in French—and say that it has to be proportionately higher than the relative weight of francophones in the country, which is 9 million over 41 million.

• (1210)

[English]

**The Chair:** Thank you.

I went over because that was an important thought to capture.

Thank you for that.

We next have Mr. Canning for five minutes, please.

**Mr. Richard Cannings (South Okanagan—West Kootenay, NDP):** Thank you.

Thank you all for being here today.

I'm going to start with Ms. Oukouomi, with the Canadian Federation of Students.

I first want to thank your organization, and all the other students who banded together in Support Our Science to force the government finally to raise the level of post-graduate scholarships and fellowships to a rate where you could at least live. I'm not sure whether you could live well, but now a master's student, if they get a scholarship, will be getting \$27,000 instead of \$17,000. It's a big difference. There was a lift in the amount of tri-council grants, which will also help fund other students.

I'm just wondering if you could comment more fully. In that sphere alone, what more needs to be done with the kind of support the federal government provides? It strikes me as good, but it's not up to the levels we see in other countries, for instance.

[Translation]

**Ms. Gishleine Oukouomi:** The first thing is to increase the total amount. Right now, the amount that each student can receive is being increased, but the number of students with access to the funds in question remains limited. Only yesterday, students were asking me if they were certain to get a scholarship if they excelled in their studies. My answer is always “no”.

From the financial standpoint, pursuing higher education is not appealing to students. When the costs and benefits are analyzed, higher education, research, and innovation are not financially rewarding. I am currently working on a Ph.D., and in comparison to others who began working after their bachelor's degree, they are earning a lot more than I am, and their living conditions are much better than mine. Yet Canada's ranking for research depends on the number of students who are conducting research and driving innovation. I would therefore say that overall funding has to be increased.

We also talked at length about francophone students. Our proposal is that the three granting councils should include francophone identity as one of the factors in establishing minority status, as is done for black or indigenous people, and that francophones should receive priority funding because most of them have trouble studying, publishing and receiving support in French, or even finding a francophone research supervisor.

More money is really needed. There's absolutely no doubt about it. What the government mainly has to do is make funding conditional. At the moment, when the government gives money to the universities, it doesn't tell them where they should be spending it. Sometimes universities receive money that doesn't end up in the hands of students. It goes instead to pay large salaries to senior university administrators, which is rather distressing when you compare their living conditions to those of students. So more funding is needed, and it's important to ensure that it gets paid directly to the students.

[English]

**Mr. Richard Cannings:** If I can pick up on that, the general funding that governments, both provincial and federal, give to universities has declined over the last 30 years. That's one of the main causes that tuition fees come up. Students are on the hook for that.

I'm just wondering if you think it would be valuable for the federal government to have a funding stream. When they're sending money to the provinces, as we do now, there are no strings attached at all. You could send money to fund universities, but it's used to pay for roads. Would it be useful to have a program that said, “This stream of money is for post-secondary education period”, and let the provinces decide how to spend that, but say, “This is what it's for”?

• (1215)

[Translation]

**Ms. Gishleine Oukouomi:** Yes, absolutely.

We have always argued for the establishment of a federal post-secondary education agency. Like health and other areas, education is a provincial jurisdiction. We understand that. However, at the federal level, a safeguard is needed to monitor what is happening. When we plead our case to the provinces, they refer us to the federal government. When we speak to the federal government, we're told that the provinces are free to...

[English]

**The Chair:** I'm sorry. We have to stop. We are getting very close to votes now. Thank you.

I'd like to get another round of questioning in, if you're able to stay for that.

**An hon. member:** [Inaudible—Editor]



**The Chair:** We're just juggling that. We're going to work on that during the break and see what we can do for the second panel.

For now, let's do a quick vote. Then we'll come back and talk about the remainder of the meeting.

• (1215) \_\_\_\_\_ (Pause) \_\_\_\_\_

• (1230)

**The Chair:** I'm going to call us back. Thank you, everyone, for your flexibility.

We'll do five-minute rounds: five minutes for the Conservatives and five minutes for Liberals; and then two and a half for each; and then we'll do a quick panel change to get an hour in with the tri-council.

We'll start with our first questioner, Mr. Lobb, for five minutes, please.

**Mr. Ben Lobb (Huron—Bruce, CPC):** Thanks very much.

Did we lose a guest, Mr. Chair?

**The Chair:** I'm sorry. Unfortunately, she couldn't stay.

**Mr. Ben Lobb:** I guess you guys get all the questions, then. Congratulations.

Depending on what school, organization or representative has appeared before the committee, one theme they have mentioned is that there should be more funding overall. We know we're going into tough times from a budget perspective, with massive multi-year deficits, which do play a part, but that's not an excuse not to fund research.

However, some of the big U15 representatives feel like they're adequate to do the heavy lifting, but if you want to provide funding to the smaller universities, or those not in the U15, they're happy to see what's left over. The smaller universities or the universities that aren't in the U15 say, "Give us a chance, and we'll show you what we can do."

It does seem, though, that the system is a little rigged towards the U15 and taking care of the U15. Am I wrong in saying that? I think I've heard testimony saying that they'd like to set it up in a way that kind of... Maybe I'm saying this the wrong way, but it does rig it towards them.

What are your thoughts on that?

[Translation]

**Mr. Martin Maltais:** Thank you for your question.

You're absolutely right. That's really the way it is. When you're part of a group that gets preferential treatment from a system, you're not going to complain about it. You'll always want more. The question for the federal government is whether that's good for Canadian society. The system disregards 9 million out of the 41 million people who make up Canada's population.

Now, what impact does that have on francophone researchers, who are members of a group that is currently marginalized? All the figures we've seen so far show this. It's undeniable. And yet, in

Canada, we have all kinds of measures to deal with situations of that kind. We are world leaders in this area. We have measures to help all kinds of groups, but we don't yet have equivalent measures to deal with French-language needs. And for French-speaking researchers, the situation is even worse.

It was suggested earlier that researchers could simply be asked to check a box to indicate that they are francophone. More funding could also be given to smaller universities, and resources shared with them. There are 65,000 francophone researchers in Canada, 35,000 of whom are in Quebec. That means there are 30,000 in the rest of Canada, and most of them don't conduct research in the French language. They don't earn their living by doing research in French. That's a major problem, and I'll give you a brief explanation of why that is.

The country is undergoing demographic growth. Every year, Canada's population grows by 1.5 million. For how long will it be possible to pursue adequate research activities across the country, and in all the French-language universities, unless we can recruit enough francophones to teach in our universities?

This is becoming a key challenge at the moment and answers have to be found. They won't be found in the current system, because we have to be able to train our own French-speaking researchers in Canada.

• (1235)

[English]

**Mr. Ben Lobb:** I have one other question for you folks. On an almost daily basis you can read an article in any of the news publications in the country about the living conditions and standards that some of our university students are facing and, certainly, exponential growth in foreign students attending Canadian universities. I think back to when I was of that age—

**The Chair:** I'm sorry, Mr. Lobb, but we are at time. Could you ask the question quickly, and we could ask for a reply in writing?

**Mr. Ben Lobb:** I guess I'd just ask if we should review what the numbers should be. Do you folks have an idea of what the obligations of a Canadian university and a Canadian taxpayer are? Also, what is the correct number of foreign students as a percentage of the school population?

**The Chair:** Great. Thank you very much.

Thank you to our witnesses.

We now go to Dr. Jaczek for five minutes, please.

**Hon. Helena Jaczek (Markham—Stouffville, Lib.):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Certainly, we've heard through the course of this study that more funding is needed for science and research here in Canada. I'm sure everyone is very happy to see that our proposed budget includes those measures.

However, our task on this committee is to look at the distribution of those funds. We've heard some suggestions that probably do have an impact on smaller colleges and universities, in particular, the administrative burden of the applications themselves. As we were told, lead investigators are increasingly spending less time doing their research and more time doing the administrative work related to cumbersome funding application processes. It's obviously much heavier on smaller institutions.

Do you have any particularly concrete suggestions for how this administrative burden—in other words, excessive red tape—could be reduced?

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Sophie Montreuil:** Thank you for your question. It's an excellent one.

Our association represents francophone researchers across the country. I've often said that being a francophone researcher in a Quebec university is completely different from being a francophone researcher in an anglophone or bilingual university elsewhere, for example at a francophone campus like the University of Alberta's Campus Saint-Jean. They are two completely different realities.

In June 2021, we published a report at the end of a two-year study in which we surveyed some 500 francophone researchers across Canada, excluding Quebec. One of the findings was that their teaching load was higher than for a francophone professor in a Quebec university, as is the case for my president. They have more courses to teach, more marking to do, and more administrative tasks. Universities and faculty members have three missions: teaching, research and community services. One of these missions is already overloaded and the other two remain. They definitely have less time for research and for finding funding for their research.

They need help to have more time. We were saying earlier that university funding is a provincial jurisdiction. Not only that, but it's the institutions themselves that decide whether or not to create faculty positions. Nevertheless, it's important to at least continue to emphasize that francophone faculty members, irrespective of their university's status, are entitled to submit funding applications in French. It's in the legislation. If their university can't provide them with the traditional forms of support, we now offer a new service. I won't go into the details, but there are some uncomplicated ways to facilitate the research grant application process for francophone researchers.

To increase funding for research in French, there have to be more applications. For there to be more applications, improved conditions in the institutions are required. What's needed, therefore, is a linked process that begins by making it easier in the institutions to submit funding applications in French, to enable universities like the University of Saskatchewan to submit some very solid funding applications in French—francophone researchers are just as good as anglophone researchers—and this would generate more research funding.

Every link in this chain has a role to play.

• (1240)

[*English*]

**Hon. Helena Jaczek:** Do I have any time left?

**The Chair:** You have 30 seconds.

**Hon. Helena Jaczek:** I think I'll pass, then.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Dr. Jaczek.

We'll go over to Mr. Blanchette-Joncas for two and a half minutes.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Maxime Blanchette-Joncas:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I'll continue with questions for Mr. Maltais.

Mr. Maltais, your colleague just explained the current vicious circle with respect to the distribution of research funding in Canada. We are clearly talking about a number of incentives, such as earmarked amounts—you mentioned this a little earlier—that would require the introduction of criteria to achieve genuine equity in terms of funding for francophone researchers in Canada.

Among other things, I'd like you to discuss the value assigned to science and French in Canada. The committee prepared a report, and it showed clearly that the success rate in applications to the granting agencies for French-speaking researchers in Canada is lower, not only in terms of the overall percentage, but also when funding applications are submitted in French rather than English. I'd like to hear what you have to say about this.

What can actually be done to ensure that French-speaking researchers have genuine access at an equivalent level to funding, no matter what institution they are from?

**Mr. Martin Maltais:** Thank you for your question, Mr. Blanchette-Joncas.

It's not complicated. Some researchers conduct research in a specific field, but the current ground rules are not in their favour. They do indeed favour research work in English.

However that may be, here is one of the things that Canada does well. When it wants to help a minority group, it establishes rules that will assist them. That's what has to happen. It's done in other areas. A few years ago, for example, it was agreed that universities were not doing enough work collegially, as a group. Rules were accordingly introduced and people began to work together as part of a team. That's how it became possible to decode the complete human genome so quickly, even though the period covered 3,000 years.

Rules promoting research in French have to be introduced to keep today's talented people interested and prepared to contribute. Allow me to repeat that 30,000 francophone researchers outside of Quebec are out of the loop. It's essential to introduce some rules.

[English]

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Finally, for two and a half minutes, we have Mr. Cannings.

[Translation]

**Mr. Richard Cannings:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

[English]

We have heard a lot today about the struggles that students face with living conditions and living costs. I heard someone—I forget who it was—who suggested that you could find accommodation for \$300-something a month, which is remarkable. It would certainly be impossible in British Columbia.

Perhaps this is rather off topic, but could that be a drawing card for students and researchers to go to smaller institutions where they could live a decent life and have a roof over their head?

We hear about the food banks students are forced to use. When I look at costs, the biggest cost I see students facing is housing. I think they are going to food banks because they just don't have any money left over.

Could you comment on this being an advantage that smaller institutions might have?

• (1245)

[Translation]

**Mr. Martin Maltais:** You're right. In principle, it would benefit the smaller institutions in terms of quality, the environment and cost of living. However, the reality or corollary is that it's precisely in the smaller universities that researchers have to spend more time on things other than research, as was mentioned earlier.

That introduces a further problem when the time comes to prepare grant applications to obtain additional funding for research activities. Access to students is also a problem. There's a reason why there are more graduate and postgraduate students in the major universities in urban centres: it's because they can provide better access to scholarships and better financial arrangements.

In the regions, there's no money available for students. My institution does not systematically make university scholarships available to students beginning graduate or postgraduate studies in my field, unless they are in very specific fields of specialization. On the other hand, the large anglophone universities in major urban centres all have funds available. Much of the federal funding is used for that at the institutional level. If the rules enabled them to do what's being done in the major centres, funds could be distributed across the country in a much more effective manner and would be more inclusive of francophone settings.

[English]

**The Chair:** Great.

Thank you both, Madame Montreuil and Monsieur Maltais for being with us.

Unfortunately, Gishleine Oukouomi had another commitment she had to go to.

Thank you to all of our witnesses. If there is something we need in writing for clarification, please do submit that.

We'll do a quick change of panel. We don't have anybody online so as soon as we get people in the seats we'll resume our meeting.

I'll suspend for a minute.

• (1245)

(Pause)

• (1250)

**The Chair:** Welcome back.

It's now my pleasure to welcome from the Canadian Institutes of Health Research, Dr. Tammy Clifford, acting president. From the Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council, we have Dr. Alejandro Adem, president; and Dr. Marc Fortin, vice-president, research grants and scholarships. Also, returning to us from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council, we have Dr. Ted Hewitt, president; and Dr. Sylvie Lamoureux, vice-president, research.

You each have five minutes for your opening comments.

We will start with Dr. Tammy Clifford, please.

[Translation]

**Dr. Tammy Clifford (Acting President, Canadian Institutes of Health Research):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'd like to thank you for inviting me to appear before your committee today. It's a privilege to take part in this meeting in support of your important work on the distribution of federal funds among post-secondary educational institutions.

[English]

As you know, the Canadian Institutes of Health Research, or CIHR, is the largest funder of health research in Canada. It serves a vibrant health research community of up to 16,000 world-class researchers annually that is more diverse than ever before and excels across all pillars of health research, from biomedical and clinical research to research on health services and population and public health.

It is important for you to know that peer review underpins the fair and transparent process that we use to choose which applications to fund, protected from biases or conflicts of interest. This means that eligible applications submitted to competitions for funding are each reviewed by an independent panel of experts in that field. These experts volunteer their time to assess and score each application, guiding decisions on how to allocate the competition's funding envelope.

Through its college of reviewers, CIHR is systematizing reviewer recruitment to identify and mobilize the appropriate expertise for the review of all funding applications, and provides reviewers with the knowledge and resources necessary to conduct consistent, fair and high-quality peer review.

As we know from the “Report from the Advisory Panel on the Federal Research Support System”, otherwise known as the Bouchard report, for Canada to truly maintain research excellence, we must support world-class research across all regions of the country in institutions of all sizes. That is why the membership of CIHR’s college of reviewers and its peer review committees are assessed for demographic gaps, including regional representation, to balance the perspectives provided in the peer review process. Additionally, all peer reviewers are offered training to make them aware of and enable them to take actions to mitigate against several potential biases, including those related to institution size.

With regard to supporting health research in Canada, CIHR recognizes that research takes place in a wide array of institutions—and for us, this includes research hospitals. To facilitate that relationship, eligible research hospitals can apply directly to us, as opposed to relying on an affiliation to another institution such as a university. This enables research hospitals to lead world-class health research that stretches beyond the priorities of the universities with which they are affiliated, contributing to the diversification of research that we fund.

It is true that post-secondary institutions account for the largest share of CIHR funding, including important research being conducted in smaller institutions across our country. However, in an effort to remove systemic barriers to accessing research funding, we have recently encouraged non-traditional institutions that have mandates to use research knowledge to improve the lives of Canadians, such as community and not-for-profit organizations, to become eligible to receive CIHR funding. We have done this by simplifying the process to become eligible to administer funding, reducing the administrative burden and harmonizing the process across the three granting agencies.

These non-traditional institutions may be eligible to hold CIHR funding, depending on the criteria of the particular funding competition. For example, following consultations with representatives of indigenous communities, CIHR updated the eligibility criteria for its flagship program, the project grant competition. Since the fall of 2020, individuals affiliated with indigenous, non-governmental organizations in Canada with a research or knowledge translation mandate have been eligible to apply directly to the competition. As of right now, there are currently 11 such organizations eligible to hold funding and to host funded researchers.

We know that a broad and inclusive health research ecosystem is a strength and advantage for Canadian innovation, and we are proud of the steps we have taken to broaden this eligibility. Taken together, these institutions enable the Government of Canada to support a diverse portfolio of health research.

• (1255)

[*Translation*]

To conclude, the CIHR, the Canadian Institutes of Health Research, continue to adapt to changing conditions. We are also committed to capacity building for research excellence in all its diversity, both within and beyond the traditional university community.

I'll be happy to answer any questions you may have.

Thank you.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Dr. Clifford.

Now, we'll go over to Dr. Adem from NSERC.

**Dr. Alejandro Adem (President, Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council):** Good morning, Mr. Chair and members of the committee.

I am pleased to be here in my capacity as president of the Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada, commonly referred to as NSERC.

[*Translation*]

Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today, alongside my colleagues from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council and the Canadian Institutes of Health Research.

I'd like to begin by briefly explaining how the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council—SSHRC for short—invests its funds and the purpose of its investments. This should provide some background to the issue being studied by your committee.

[*English*]

NSERC's vision is to help make Canada a country of discoverers and innovators for the benefit of all Canadians. We invest in talent, discovery-focused research and innovation through partnerships and programs that support post-secondary research in the fields of natural sciences and engineering, and provide support through grants and scholarships, with the majority of NSERC awards being allocated to individual researchers or trainees. Applications are evaluated on their own merit, and the process focuses on factors such as the excellence of the researcher, the quality of the scientific proposal and the plan for training students at all levels in preparation for research-intensive and research-centric occupations across numerous sectors.

[*Translation*]

The experts brought in by the SSHRC follow a strict peer review process regardless of variables like the language of the application, the career stage of the applicant or the size of the institution.

SSHRC complies with an international reference standard for research assessment. We are nevertheless aware of the fact that differences in institution size may have an impact on the application assessment process.

[*English*]

To ensure fairness and representation during peer review, NSERC solicits expert input from domestic and international reviewers from institutions of all sizes and regions, who are at various stages in their careers. How reviewers evaluate contributions also helps safeguard against potential biases in the review process that could favour larger institutions. In their applications, researchers are encouraged to highlight items such as service to and engagement with the community, mentoring and promoting the importance of science to youth and under-represented groups, or even public policy work that informs decision-makers. This expanded scope of contributions being assessed reduces barriers and enables researchers to highlight the importance of their work, regardless of their geographical location or size of their institution.

[*Translation*]

SSHRC closely monitors the allocation of funds awarded and applications received. We closely study applicant profiles to identify factors like the language of the application, the career stage of the applicants and whether they are members of an under-represented group.

As is the case with peer assessment, our goal is to ensure that all Canadians benefit from our grants and awards and contribute to maintaining a level playing field.

[*English*]

Finally, I will briefly mention NSERC's internal standing committees, such as the committee on discovery research and the committee on research and technology partnerships. These committees provide strategic advice and direction on pressing issues facing the agency. The committees intentionally comprise representatives from institutions that vary, as examples, in size, primary language and geographic location. A diverse committee membership helps ensure that input is balanced, fairly represents feedback from the research community and, pertinent to the question being studied by the committee, ensures that all institutions have a say.

[*Translation*]

NSERC has been proactive in recognizing that the realities of small institutions may differ from larger institutions.

● (1300)

[*English*]

We have developed programs to provide additional support to applicants from smaller institutions. For example, the discovery development grants provide resources to researchers from small universities. Each award has a two-year duration and provides recipients with resources to build their research program. The undergraduate student research awards program, which supports more than 3,000 students annually, has awards set aside specifically for small institutions. Lastly, the equity, diversity and inclusion institutional capacity-building grants were only made available to small institutions and colleges.

[*Translation*]

I hope the information that I have provided today will help you in your deliberations.

I would be happy to address any additional questions or comments about NSERC's mandate and its programs.

Thank you.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

Now we go to Dr. Hewitt for five minutes, please.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Ted Hewitt (President, Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council):** Thank you, Mr. Chair, and members of the committee, for the opportunity to contribute to this important study.

[*English*]

Let me begin today by saying how pleased I am to see the new sign in front of my place, and also the new investments in research proposed in the last federal budget and how positively this news was received across the communities we serve.

[*Translation*]

Our primary role at the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council, or SSHRC, is to support research, research training, and knowledge mobilization in the humanities and social sciences. In addition, we have been mandated to deliver a suite of prestigious tri-agency programs, such as the Canada Research Chairs program, the New Frontiers in Research Fund and the Research Support Fund, among several others.

[*English*]

Almost 100% of SSHRC of grants are awarded to students, researchers and research teams, following expert or peer review conducted in accordance with global best practice. These awards are administered by Canada's post-secondary institutions—the central pillars of the Canadian research ecosystem—which receive their mandates and operating funds primarily from the provinces or territories. Research is just one component of their mandate, albeit an extremely important one.

As you're all well aware, post-secondary institutions come in all sizes and are oriented to diverse missions, from our very large and complex research institutions that offer extensive graduate training, to smaller universities and colleges that focus primarily on undergraduate or vocational education. Indeed, SSHRC has a special relationship with these smaller institutions in particular, as they often tend to have a higher concentration of social sciences and humanities researchers and faculty.

[*Translation*]

Our funding programs at SSHRC are designed to support research across Canada at postsecondary institutions of all sizes and missions. In some cases, our programming provides the necessary investments to build world-class centres of research expertise that compete on the world stage. In others, SSHRC funding can play an important role in addressing regional issues or strengthening services to local communities.

In all of this, SSHRC works to ensure that the research we fund contributes to Canada's innovation agenda by building a more inclusive and representative research community, enhancing support for early career researchers, promoting research conducted in both official languages, and strengthening indigenous research and research training capacity.

[*English*]

SSHRC closely monitors the distribution of its funding to ensure that all Canadians benefit from public investments in research. Periodically, we adjust to new realities and identify gaps in the research ecosystem.

One such gap we have identified relates to differences in application and success rates for smaller institutions relative to larger ones. Larger institutions that are well supported by their provincial governments have access to resources that allow them to recruit research-intensive faculty, graduate student support and assistance in preparing research grant applications, both domestically and internationally.

On the other hand, in accordance with institutional priorities or missions, teaching loads at smaller institutions can limit the time that faculty may engage in research. Faculty also may have more limited access to graduate students and other trainees who support the research process.

To help level the playing field, SSHRC has introduced a range of practices over the years. For example, to ensure fairness in adjudication, we routinely work to ensure that expert review panels and committees include representatives from a range of institutional types. We also provide block grants to institutions that they may use to help build research capacity, as well as special supplements to smaller institutions.

Within the Canada research chairs program and the research support fund, progressive formulae are applied to make sure that minimum allocations or funding are reserved for smaller institutions.

• (1305)

[*Translation*]

I can provide more details on these and other mechanisms we employ to support research at institutions from coast to coast to coast. And, of course, I would be happy to answer any other questions you may have about SSHRC's mandate, programs and relationship with postsecondary institutions.

Thank you for your attention.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Thank you, Dr. Hewitt.

Thanks to all the witnesses for being here and for staying with us for the meeting. This will be our last hour of this study, and it will be important for your testimony to be part of the study.

We'll start with Ms. Rempel Garner for the first six minutes, please.

**Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner (Calgary Nose Hill, CPC):** Thank you, Chair.

Thank you for being here and for your work.

Removing barriers to equality of opportunity for diverse researchers is important to me. I'll begin by focusing my questions on the tri-council's self-identification questionnaire, which was established in 2018 and is now a requirement, I believe, for applicants to be eligible for federal research funding.

In filling out this form, could an applicant's race, gender or sexual orientation be used to either disqualify them or qualify them for a federally funded position or research funding?

**Mr. Ted Hewitt:** The short answer to that is no. This is a tool that we use to collect information on applicants. It is completely voluntary. You can refuse to respond to the questions in it if you wish. It is not used in the peer review process, but it helps us better understand who is applying, what their background is and how the outcome of the peer review process turned out for them so that we can better monitor or better understand where there are systemic biases in the system.

**Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner:** There have been several high-profile cases of complaints related to the Canada research chair program using, essentially, race-based hiring processes. In those positions, are gender or sexual orientation or race used to either qualify or disqualify candidates from those positions?

**Mr. Ted Hewitt:** In these cases, as you may be aware, members of the committee, we pursue policies that were established in law by the Federal Court and subject to a mediation that was overseen by the Canada Human Rights Commission.

Those policies are contained in an addendum to the program and are set to ensure that by the year 2030 the Canada research chair program will look more like Canada in terms of the distribution of—

**Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner:** That's a perfect bridge to my next question.

Those targets state that by December 2029, women and gender minorities must make up close to 51%, and 22% must be visible minorities, 7.5% must be people with disabilities, and 4.9% must be indigenous.

As of September 2023, roughly 48% were held by women and gender minorities, 28.6% by racial minorities, 7% by people with disabilities, and 4.1% by indigenous scholars. So, we're close.

Is there a plan to remove race-based or gender-based hiring practices once those targets are hit?

**Mr. Ted Hewitt:** That's a very good question, because we are under the mandate of the Federal Court, under the mediated settlement that was overseen by the Canadian Human Rights Commission. I would say that would be a very happy outcome, and I would be the first person to entertain the discussions that might see the elimination of the need to be doing that.

**Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner:** Has the tri-council undertaken any work to articulate what conditions would have to be established for those hiring practices to be eliminated, and has that work been communicated to the federal government?

**Mr. Ted Hewitt:** Right now, we operate under the terms and conditions that were set by the Federal Court and the Canadian Human Rights Commission.

**Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner:** I'm asking you if any work has been done by the tri-council to set the conditions by which race-based hiring targets or practices would be eliminated.

**Mr. Ted Hewitt:** I think we want to get to the targets first and then have the conversation about whether we would need them.

• (1310)

**Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner:** However, we're close. We're there.

**Mr. Ted Hewitt:** Well, we're not quite there.

**Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner:** We're really close.

**Mr. Ted Hewitt:** We're not quite there, and a lot can happen in the next few years.

**The Chair:** Perhaps I could jump in: just go through the chair.

**Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner:** Okay, that work hasn't been done yet.

In a 2024 news article, a Wilfrid Laurier University biochemistry professor stated that "Laurier University's 'Inclusive Excellence' program aimed to hire six black and six indigenous faculty." Making a long story short, they had a Black applicant apply. No indigenous persons applied. It was for an indigenous person, so the position was essentially let go.

What safeguards has the tri-council put in place to ensure that minority groups aren't pitted against each other in race-based hiring practices?

**Mr. Ted Hewitt:** We set the targets. We work with the institutions so that locally they can set the targets for their particular institution and the mechanisms that they would use under the laws of Canada to achieve those targets.

**Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner:** So, you're really hamstrung by the law right now, and you're saying that the law doesn't really allow for those types of safeguards to be put in place.

**Mr. Ted Hewitt:** I'm not sure I understand the question. In terms of safeguards, we're looking to achieve certain objectives with respect to the program. We are operating under the rulings of the Federal Court and the Canadian Human Rights Commission. I think we're talking more in terms of how we're acting proactively to make sure that the representation is in place, as opposed to safeguarding in other respects. At this point—

**Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner:** That's very helpful.

Mr. Hewitt, the committee recently received notice of the order in council that enabled your reappointment to your role. Were tri-council EDI policies applied to your reappointment?

**Mr. Ted Hewitt:** I have no idea. I applied for the position; I received it. That might be a question for those who were responsible for that appointment.

**Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner:** If the government applied tri-council EDI rules, like the rules your agency uses for funding allocations to you, would you have been reappointed?

**Mr. Ted Hewitt:** That would very much depend on who the other candidates were.

**Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner:** Okay. Do you want to elaborate on that for me?

**Mr. Ted Hewitt:** I have no idea who the other candidates were. How would I know? That would be a confidential process.

**Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner:** So, we don't know if your own agency's EDI targets were applied to your reappointment.

**Mr. Ted Hewitt:** I'm appointed through a Governor in Council process; I'm not appointed by the agency. I'm appointed by the Government of Canada through the GIC process. Those would be questions for those who manage that.

**Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner:** Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you. That was a good discussion.

This is a reminder to address the comments and questions through the chair. It would be helpful so that we don't get into the back-and-forth banter that could happen. It didn't this time.

We go to Arielle Kayabaga, please, for the next six minutes.

**Ms. Arielle Kayabaga (London West, Lib.):** Thank you, Chair. I also would like to welcome our witnesses to this committee and thank them for the work they do.

I have a question for Ms. Clifford. In your remarks, you mentioned the smaller, non-traditional institutions that can apply. Can you give an example of what kinds of smaller institutions these are? What's the process? How many have applied and received funding?

I'll follow up with other questions after your answer.

**Dr. Tammy Clifford:** Maybe for the latter part I will follow up with you afterwards with the numbers of those who have applied.

One example would be ITK. I think the members of this committee are familiar with this Inuit organization. They recently applied to be eligible to apply for and hold CIHR funding and were successful in satisfying those requirements.

To give you an idea of what's required—again, this would be for any institution in the country, whether it be big, small, traditional or non-traditional—we require that they are engaged in research, including a knowledge translation mandate, or research training in related activities; that they are based in Canada; and that they submit supporting documentation. It's that supporting documentation that largely speaks to finances. Do they have the support available in the organization to be able to handle and manage the documentation that we do require, like financially audited statements?

These organizations' eligibility is reviewed every five years on the basis of being able to continue satisfying those requirements vis-à-vis the financial reporting.

The institutions also sign an agreement, and in doing so they commit to developing and implementing policies, administrative systems, procedures and controls needed to comply with the requirements of receiving federal funding.

Again, we're open to those, large or small and traditional or non-traditional, and there's a very well-articulated process for those to follow. I'm happy to provide you with the numbers for what that distribution is over time.

They do go on. I should say it's not just an application to be eligible to receive the funding; in fact, researchers affiliated with those institutions have gone on to hold CIHR grants themselves.

Thank you.

• (1315)

**Ms. Arielle Kayabaga:** Thank you.

I have one last question on that. What are the threshold criteria for them to qualify as non-traditional? You did talk about the funding. I'm curious to know, when they are applying and receiving funding, what demographic you're looking for and how many of them are maybe francophone or other racialized communities.

**Dr. Tammy Clifford:** That's an excellent question. There's no threshold in terms of size, whether it's the number of teaching staff or research staff or the size of the community. In fact, anyone is eligible to apply.

For those demographics, we are able to get them in a breakdown according to whether they are francophone or according to their ge-

ographic location across the country. I'm very happy to provide that. The good thing is that we love data. We have a lot of it. I'm very pleased to be able to share to inform this committee's very important study.

**Ms. Arielle Kayabaga:** Absolutely. If you do have some stuff that you could submit to the committee, I would really appreciate that.

I'm going to go to Mr. Hewitt and return to what my colleague was asking about around the safeguards you have set to protect some of these demographics to make sure that they also receive...and are equally included.

Can you elaborate a little bit on that? I don't think I heard the answer, and I want to see what safeguards are in place to keep the targets your organization has set to make sure there isn't a change in that.

**Mr. Ted Hewitt:** Under the requirements of the program, certain targets were set with institutions in accordance with their local circumstances to ensure that positions were filled in proportions that were established under the addendum within the agreement that was set by the Federal Court.

We work with the institutions to develop targets and thereby encourage them to use whatever hiring practices are allowed under the laws of Canada and the provinces to achieve those. It's up to the institutions to find ways to do that.

In some cases, there are no issues. They have open calls. They hire candidates. All of these candidates are approved by the Canada research chairs program on the criterion of excellence once they are nominated by institutions—

**Ms. Arielle Kayabaga:** I'm sorry. Maybe I didn't ask my question in the right way.

I'm trying to understand. In order to keep the continuity of the criteria—

**The Chair:** I'm sorry, but we are out of time.

**Mr. Ted Hewitt:** They're monitored over time.

**Ms. Arielle Kayabaga:** Mr. Chair, can I get that in a written response?

**The Chair:** We'll get that.

I'm going to Mr. Blanchette-Joncas for six minutes.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Maxime Blanchette-Joncas:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

My first question is for Ms. Clifford.

Ms. Clifford, regarding the concentration of funding going to a small number of universities, the Canadian Institutes for Health Research are the least egalitarian, with 90% of funding going to the 15 largest universities in Canada.



How can we enable new universities to establish health research centres with this being the situation?

**Dr. Tammy Clifford:** Thank you for your question.

[*English*]

Perhaps I could speak a little more generally to support for francophone research at CIHR.

Within my tenure at CIHR, which is about the past five and a half years, we have implemented some changes—not all that we need, but some—in order to support francophone health research and researchers.

For example, we all know it takes a little longer to write things in French than in English, so one of the first things we did about five years ago was to provide about 20% more space for francophones to convey their study methodologies in the application.

For our peer review committees—which I mentioned earlier are a critical part of how we determine where our funding goes—we are also providing translation services at all stages of the process, from application all the way through to peer review.

Perhaps most importantly, in 2021 with our flagship project grant competition, we implemented what we call "equalization". It provides an ability for us to ensure that the proportion of successful grants is at least equal to the proportion of grants that have been received, in this case in French.

For example, if 15% of the applications come in French, 15% of the grants that are awarded will also go to that population.

We know there's more to do.

• (1320)

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Maxime Blanchette-Joncas:** Ms. Clifford, I acknowledge all the initiatives you may have taken to improve the presence of science in French. However, you are surely aware that 50% of French-speaking researchers, who represent a little over 20% of the population of researchers in Canada, make their applications in English.

You can tell me that you equalize the amount of funding, but we know that 50% of these researchers are already submitting their applications in English, because the success rates for funding are higher when they apply in English. At the Canadian Institutes for Health Research, or CIHR, in particular, we know that success rates are higher when applications are submitted in English.

I understand the efforts being made, but the flip-flopping still shows us that there is an imbalance and there is discrimination against French-speaking researchers in Canada when it comes to access to research funding, particularly in the case of research activities in French in Canada.

I want to come back to my original question.

How do you explain the fact that 90% of funding is allocated to 15 universities at the Canadian Institutes for Health Research?

It is fine to say over and over that we believe in this ideological way of understanding excellence, but excellence also exists outside

the 15 big universities. The rest of the universities in Canada receive only 10% of the funding.

How can we ensure that scientific research in health progresses and take on the challenges facing society when this funding is concentrated in the academic centres at only 15 universities in Canada?

**Dr. Tammy Clifford:** Thank you for that clarification.

[*English*]

For CIHR, when we take a look at who receives our funding, certainly there is the U15 group with its affiliated institutes. We also look to research hospitals, as well as the small and medium institutions and the other organizations that I mentioned in response to the previous question.

I would try to clarify the difference between the number of grants received versus the amount of grants received, because there is a qualitative difference in the size of grants for different kinds of research. For example, I'm trained as an epidemiologist, so I don't require a lot of equipment, but we know that some medical research does.

My point here is that we do see strength in smaller and medium-sized universities in health research that is not as equipment intensive, so it is a recognition of the strengths of the smaller universities in the social, environmental and cultural aspects of health research, which are very critical to our ability to benefit most.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Maxime Blanchette-Joncas:** Ms. Clifford, I would like to come back to the essence of my question.

How can research funding in Canada be distributed more equitably for small or medium universities so they are able to expand their scientific research, particularly in health, by receiving funds from the Canadian Institutes of Health Research?

At present, it is a vicious circle: The bigger an institution is, the more chance it has of getting funding. So how can small or medium universities survive? Is everybody going to have to move to Toronto?

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Answer very briefly, please.

**Dr. Tammy Clifford:** I'll be brief.

CIHR has many different funding programs. I've mentioned the project grant competition, which has about a 20% success rate across the country. Strategic funding has higher success rates. In fact, that is where I would encourage all institutions to consider applying again. Once you receive your first grant, it does become easier to get subsequent grants, of course, because you have that track record, if you will.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

We'll go to Mr. Cannings for six minutes, please.

**Mr. Richard Cannings:** Thank you to you all for being here.

I am going to stay with Dr. Clifford for the moment.

You mentioned that research hospitals can apply directly for funds. I guess I'm a bit ignorant—that may be the word—about how all of this works. I assume that these research hospitals, or at least most of them, are connected with a university. Is that the case?

• (1325)

**Dr. Tammy Clifford:** Yes, it is. I don't have the data as to whether I would say it's all of them, but I would say that most of them would be affiliated with, let's say, a parent university, if you will. However, at CIHR, the research hospitals are able to apply directly to us as opposed to having to go through their affiliated university.

**Mr. Richard Cannings:** When they're applying for funds by that method, would that be institutions applying for funds or strategic grants or something—not individual researchers applying for project grants? Is that the difference there?

**Dr. Tammy Clifford:** It would be both. In some cases, a researcher or a professor may have an affiliation at more than one institution. Again, it is up to the researcher to identify on that application who their parent institution is, if you will.

It provides flexibility. What we have seen and what we hear in health research is that, because universities serve a wide variety of research interests, health topics may not be necessarily prioritized by the university; however, they would be by the research hospital.

**Mr. Richard Cannings:** Right, okay. I think that clears it up for me.

I'll turn to Dr. Adem about NSERC.

We've heard from many of the smaller colleges and other institutions about their particular strengths. A lot of them are able to do flexible research projects, projects brought to them by industry, for instance, but they have had, at least in the past, difficulty in applying for NSERC grants to match those funds or support that in research because the timelines don't match.

Now, we heard something, I think, in our last meeting that the issue has been addressed by NSERC, hopefully, so that there is more flexibility in timelines when there are intake periods so that, if an opportunity comes up, the application can go right in and hopefully get quick approval.

Is that something that NSERC can do for those smaller institutions?

**Dr. Alejandro Adem:** We run the community college integration program for the three councils. That's dedicated to colleges, polytechnics and CEGEPs. It has been growing quite a bit over the years. In fact, it's the program that's grown the most over the past 10 years. It's still insufficient, given the demand, but we are in continual contact with the stakeholders to create conditions that favour the sort of delivery that is appropriate for that sector. The partnerships they have with industry, with committees, of course, are stellar and the key foundation for the work they do.

I think that issue is being addressed, but, on a continual basis, we're in touch with that community and always seeking to tweak the programs to address the specific needs of the stakeholders.

**Mr. Richard Cannings:** I move to Dr. Hewitt. You mentioned that SSHRC gives block grants to small institutions. What's allowed to be charged under those block grants? We hear a lot about small institutions lacking the capacity, lacking the overhead, and about the administrative costs. Is that something they can put in or use directly from those block grants?

**Mr. Ted Hewitt:** For us, that is precisely the issue. We're going to fund excellence wherever it exists. In many cases, in smaller institutions they lack the resources, for whatever reason, to assist faculty in making applications to the agency.

We provide the block grants, and they can be used for anything that's eligible under our funding. It's typically used for smaller grants, which are adjudicated locally by peer review, below the value that we would normally offer. You can get a grant of \$5,000, \$6,000 to help start your research and develop the base for a larger application. It could be used for travel to conferences. It could be used for developing capacity within the institution to mentor or to provide support. It's a very broad range of activities particularly tied to the needs of the local institution to help it increase the number, which can be quite small, and the prospects for success of these institutions.

• (1330)

**Mr. Richard Cannings:** Do the institutions apply for these grants?

**Mr. Ted Hewitt:** They don't need to apply. The money's distributed on a formula, and there is also extra money for the smallest of the institutions that they receive automatically, that they can apply for these purposes.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

We go to Mr. Tochor for five minutes, please.

**Mr. Corey Tochor (Saskatoon—University, CPC):** Thank you very much.

Thank you to our witnesses for being here today.

Dr. Hewitt, you became president of SSHRC in 2015. You were reappointed. I was encouraged by your testimony that you guys review the expert review panels and closely monitor the funding of students. That's encouraging to hear.

I have a couple of comments about a media report that came out in April this year, it was within the last month, on April 27. In this report...with SSHRC funding, one of the policies is not to support partisan activities. Is that correct?

**Mr. Ted Hewitt:** Absolutely.

**Mr. Corey Tochor:** Your organization wouldn't fund a group that says, "Don't vote for Liberals." That would be too partisan for you.

**Mr. Ted Hewitt:** I would suggest that's correct, yes.

**Mr. Corey Tochor:** How do you explain the report in the media—and this is the title, "Left-wing 'fact checker' fined for targeting Scheer"—that SSHRC funds went to an organization that put out a voting guide that recommended voting against the Conservatives in the 2019 election? You didn't fine them, but you funded them. How much money went to this group?

**Mr. Ted Hewitt:** I can't remember the exact amount. It's in the order of tens of thousands of dollars. It went to fund the research, not the guide, which we found to be in contravention of our policy. We informed the institution that in no way should any publicity or notification around the use of that guide mention the word or the logo of SSHRC because we did not fund the guide. We funded the basic underlying research that might have been used for the guide. The institution made the corrections.

**Mr. Corey Tochor:** Did you get the money back or did you ask for the money back?

**Mr. Ted Hewitt:** No, we did not, because the money was not used for the guide. The money was used for underlying research that may or may not have been used in the guide.

**Mr. Corey Tochor:** That guide was paid for by the university, then. Some of that—

**Mr. Ted Hewitt:** It was not paid by us, sir.

**Mr. Corey Tochor:** It wasn't paid by SSHRC.

**Mr. Ted Hewitt:** Absolutely not.

**Mr. Corey Tochor:** When you reviewed this, you read the story, did you call in the people who approved this funding and review that process they went through?

**Mr. Ted Hewitt:** Absolutely, because we wanted to know what the background was initially for the funding that had been accorded to the institution. We also talked extensively to the institution and to the researcher, through the institution.

**Mr. Corey Tochor:** After the meeting, can you put forward, in writing, any members of that panel that approved this funding?

**Mr. Ted Hewitt:** It would have been done internally at the time, so I can certainly investigate how it had been done, but in accordance with the investigation that we would have done at the time, it was absolutely in accordance with our process. What we had issue with—

**Mr. Corey Tochor:** You're not supportive of this at all, then. Obviously—

**Mr. Ted Hewitt:** No.

**Mr. Corey Tochor:** What steps have you put forward that will stop this from happening again?

**Mr. Ted Hewitt:** One thing we have done is to say that, in cases in which we find our logo.... There are rules and standards that are used associated with the use of our logo. We have told institutions that, if we feel the logo is not being used appropriately, we will withdraw permission for institutions to use the logo.

**Mr. Corey Tochor:** Is it just the branding that you're worried about or the funding?

**Mr. Ted Hewitt:** We did not fund it. We do not want it branded as having funded it. We want to make sure there's no confusion in that regard.

**Mr. Corey Tochor:** But you funded research that went into a partisan guide.

**Mr. Ted Hewitt:** The research was fine by our standard. It was the use of the research in the guide, and the use of the logo to signify that, somehow, we had supported the guide that we objected to.

**Mr. Corey Tochor:** But it's not just the logo that is the problem. It's the dollars that are flowing to an organization that is doing research in a partisan way. It doesn't sound like—other than protecting your logo—there have been any other steps to stop this from happening again.

**Mr. Ted Hewitt:** The research that was funded was funded under our processes. Some of that research might have been used somehow to create the guide, but the research itself was done under the auspices of the university and in accordance with its processes as well. There was no issue with the research itself.

**Mr. Corey Tochor:** So there's no problem with the.... This did surprise you, though, the reports, and finding out that, perhaps, partisan.... That surprised you.

Did you personally look at the research they did?

**Mr. Ted Hewitt:** I was involved in ensuring the institution did a proper review, and I was certainly involved with the conversations with the institution and the researcher to make sure our money was not used in a partisan way.

**Mr. Corey Tochor:** Was there a report generated on that research that you received from the institution?

**Mr. Ted Hewitt:** I'm not sure there's a report. There's correspondence that would be available.

• (1335)

**Mr. Corey Tochor:** I'd like to see the correspondence of their explaining the research—

**Mr. Ted Hewitt:** Sure.

**Mr. Corey Tochor:**—and the research itself, because this is questionable. We have a cost-of-living crisis across Canada, which is hurting the amount of research that is done at our post-secondary institutions, and here's an example where tens of thousands of dollars went to questionable research for partisan reasons. For every group that comes in here looking for additional dollars, there were additional dollars in SSHRC that went to research for partisan reasons.

**Mr. Ted Hewitt:** It was not, in our view. I reject that.

**The Chair:** Okay. We'll move on to the next five minutes with Ms. Bradford, please.

**Ms. Valerie Bradford:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you so much to our witnesses. It's wonderful to have the three tri-council funding agencies here together in person.

This is a question I'd like each one of you to answer from your perspective. On April 18 of this year, Dr. Dena McMartin of the University of Lethbridge told this committee that members of review committees responsible for awarding funding have to pass judgment on the institutional capacity of institutions. In her opinion, these review criteria pose a problem, as the experts are not in a position to make these judgments.

Do the evaluation criteria based on the host institution's institutional capacity cause inequitable funding decisions? What adjustments could be made to the peer review process?

**Dr. Alejandro Adem:** I'll start first if you want.

We're always checking for biases and distortions in the review process. I don't know how familiar you are with the discovery grant system. We have hundreds of committee members evaluating them. We had 3,000 applications this year and we awarded over 2,000 grants.

Questions that are asked about institutional capacity would be mostly, I believe, for experimental, large-scale research and whether that is feasible. I would agree with the comment that this would not necessarily always be... It's a difficult call in some cases, right? We have members of our staff who are there and who are always reminding the committees that they shouldn't go in those directions.

Of course, no system is perfect, but we are proud of the fairness of our granting system. Those issues have been flagged to us and we're continually working with the committees—we're in direct contact with them—to try to continually have the best practices.

It's a very good point and something that we're continually trying to mitigate.

**Ms. Valerie Bradford:** Thank you.

**Dr. Tammy Clifford:** Perhaps if I could just add to that, I agree with Dr. Adem's comments as well.

In terms of the peer review committees that we have for our project grant competition, we have about 60 peer review panels who operate twice a year. We do have members of staff who are at those peer review panels, and we are monitoring for comments that might suggest a bias according to institutional size as well as some other elements.

To Dr. Adem's point, though, these applications that are submitted to us do receive institutional sign-off. When the institution or the university itself signs off on it, they are effectively saying, "We're able to do the work".

Is it a perfect system yet? No, but through monitoring and the training that we do provide for peer reviewers, we're working to be able to address that particular potential bias as well as others.

Thank you.

**Ms. Valerie Bradford:** Okay. Thank you.

Mr. Hewitt.

**Mr. Ted Hewitt:** I have a similar response.

It's interesting; my first position was at the University of Lethbridge, so it's a place I know well.

It's a smaller institution, by the way, and I would say that it has similar processes in place. We try to keep committees broadly representative, so that there are people from larger institutions and smaller institutions.

We also have a system of observers who sit in committees. These are academics who don't participate, but they listen and provide reports where they believe there are anomalies or issues.

Peer review is not a perfect process, as we all know. We can learn from this at the end of the day and make sure that instructions to committees are taken appropriately to make sure that certain things do not happen and certain assumptions are not made.

This is what we do, basically.

**Ms. Valerie Bradford:** Thank you.

Continuing with you, Mr. Hewitt, grants from the research support fund that help the institutions finance the indirect costs of research are calculated based on the funding that institutions have received in the past. The program provides for higher percentages for institutions that have received less funding.

This mechanism does not apply to the research security component of the fund, and the committee heard that smaller institutions receive small grants.

To be eligible for research security funding, institutions must receive at least \$2 million in direct research funding from the granting agencies.

Should this threshold be changed?

• (1340)

**Mr. Ted Hewitt:** Are you asking my opinion?

**Ms. Valerie Bradford:** Yes. That's all you can offer, right?

**Mr. Ted Hewitt:** I think it should be reviewed. This was a decision that was taken in consultation with the department to which we report, and that would be Innovation, Science and Economic Development, or what we affectionately call ISED. That was the decision that was ultimately taken in order to make best use of the funds in their view at the time.

Should we be reviewing that? Absolutely.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Monsieur Blanchette-Joncas, you have two and a half minutes.

[Translation]

**Mr. Maxime Blanchette-Joncas:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

My questions are for the three witnesses who are here.

A number of witnesses have voiced their concerns about the funding allocated to French-speaking researchers, that is, to francophone researchers. They agreed with certain recommendations made by the Canadian Federation of Students and the Association francophone pour le savoir, among others. They proposed that francophones be recognized as an under-represented group. At present, the funding they are granted is lower not only than their demographic weight, but also than the proportion of francophone faculty in Canada.

Do you think there could be an incentive, or even a criterion, that would allow for there to be dedicated envelopes at the funding organizations in order to ensure the vitality of research in French?

**Mr. Ted Hewitt:** That would be a good way to ensure such vitality. With that said, we contribute to support mechanisms organized by the Université de Sherbrooke and funded by both Acfas and the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council.

We are also going to create other mechanisms for encouraging researchers to submit grant applications in French, but there are—

**Mr. Maxime Blanchette-Joncas:** Mr. Hewitt, what I am trying to find out is whether you would agree to that kind of criterion being adopted. At present, it does not exist.

You are explaining what you do right now, but it does not seem to be working, since there is still an imbalance. I am trying to find solutions.

At present, francophone researchers in Canada are at a disadvantage because research funding is concentrated in the anglophone university network: 80% of research funding is divided among 15 universities, 13 of which are anglophone universities. If we do a quick calculation, we see that there is an imbalance. Francophones have to leave home and enter the anglophone network or contend with obstacles in order to get access to higher education.

As the guardian of the funds allocated for funding research in Canada, do you agree to there being ways of ensuring an equitable proportion of the funding in order to fully redress the imbalance for French-speaking researchers in Canada?

**Mr. Ted Hewitt:** It is a complicated problem, and we are no doubt going to study it with our colleagues and Acfas.

**Mr. Maxime Blanchette-Joncas:** Mr. Adem, do you want to add something?

**Dr. Alejandro Adem:** Thank you.

I think one of the big problems is that since 2014, only 4% of discovery grant applications, for example, were made in French. As well, only 8% of applicants reported that French was their preferred language of correspondence. I think this is not a good situation.

[English]

**The Chair:** We are at time, but do you have a brief comment, Dr. Clifford?

[Translation]

**Mr. Maxime Blanchette-Joncas:** Ms. Clifford, do you agree with the proposal?

**Dr. Tammy Clifford:** Yes, we need to consider it.

[English]

**The Chair:** Thank you.

For the final two and a half minutes, we have Mr. Cannings.

**Mr. Richard Cannings:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

As I think we're in your final minutes as chair, I just wanted to personally thank you for your work here. You've done a remarkable job. Thank you very much.

I'm going to go back to Dr. Clifford again just to wrap this up and get my mind around how the CIHR works with the research hospitals. It's obvious that a university that also has a research hospital will attract more funding from CIHR, because it has that hospital and because of the fact that both the university and the research hospital can apply, along with, presumably, the associated researchers who may be tied to both of those.

Is there some way that amplifies the possibility that those institutions will get more money than smaller institutions?

• (1345)

**Dr. Tammy Clifford:** That's a really good question. I might need to go back and look at the distribution of the research hospitals and then their affiliated institutions, but perhaps, theoretically....

In terms of health research, if you were, for example, to speak to HealthCareCAN and those who are active in the health research space, they would very clearly articulate the importance of being able to apply directly as a health institution as opposed to as a university, given the wide variety of priorities for a university.

I'd be happy to go back and look at the linkages between the research hospitals and the universities and, with our funding analytics team, kind of tease that out a little bit better. That's a very good question.

I did start my career, after I finished my schooling, at the CHEO Research Institute. I also had an affiliation with the University of Ottawa. At the time, I didn't really think too much about it, but obviously now I'm in the midst of it.

I appreciate the question.

**Mr. Richard Cannings:** Thank you.

I'll leave it there.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Also, thank you all for being here and for staying so that we could hear your testimony today. As I said at the beginning, it was very important to hear from you. Certainly, you've given us some more details for the analyst to work with.

Before we adjourn today, I have two small items.

One is that we've circulated the budget for the upcoming study on science and research in Canada's Arctic in relation to climate change. Do we have approval for that budget so that we can keep going?

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

**The Chair:** I see thumbs up and nods of heads. Thank you. We'll do that by consent.

Mr. Cannings mentioned that this is my last meeting. I'll be resigning the chair effective the end of the day on Monday, so Tuesday, when the meeting starts in public, the clerk will begin the meeting with the first item on the agenda being the election of a new chair. I will be continuing as a member on the side and answering questions, but, more importantly, I'll be able to do some of that work virtually, given some of the other commitments I have in my life.

Thank you all for your collaboration and co-operation in my time as chair. It's been a pleasure to serve, and I look forward to serving as a member at the side of the table.

We're going to be looking for unanimous consent in the House after question period to table report 10, which we had hoped to do at the beginning of the day today. In my role as chair, that will hopefully be something that we get completed and across the finish line. I know the Conservatives have a dissenting report they also want to table. Hopefully, we get unanimous consent to do that.

With that, I'll look for adjournment and I wish you all the best.

Thank you.

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