

L'UQO doit s'ouvrir aux communautés non-francophones, plaide Marcel Proulx

Le Droit

L'Université du Québec en Outaouais (UQO), en tant qu'institution francophone, doit affirmer son identité tout en manifestant une ouverture aux communautés non-francophones, croit le député libéral de Hull-Aylmer, Marcel Proulx. Dans un mémoire présenté, hier, dans le cadre d'une consultation publique organisée par l'UQO sur sa politique linguistique,

M. Proulx précise que l'université devrait, selon lui, maintenir le français comme langue exclusive d'enseignement au premier cycle. Il ajoute cependant que l'UQO devrait pouvoir offrir des cours en anglais ou dans une autre langue que le français au niveau de la maîtrise et du doctorat, mais en autant que ceux-ci soient disponibles en français. M. Proulx reproche à l'UQO, par le biais du projet de politique linguistique qu'elle soumet à la

population, de vouloir fermer l'accès aux programmes présentement offerts en anglais tout en empêchant tout développement ultérieur de programmes ou de cours offerts dans une langue autre que le français. Il croit que l'UQO se place ainsi dans une « situation injustifiée » qui « rompt non seulement avec une longue tradition outaouaise, mais aussi avec la voie prise par les autres universités québécoises ».

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University shouldn't drop English courses, cabinet minister says

Gatineau school should serve whole community: Pelletier

BY DAVE ROGERS

The Quebec provincial cabinet minister responsible for the Outaouais, Benoît Pelletier, says Gatineau's Université du Québec en Outaouais should recognize the needs of the whole community as it considers a plan to phase out English-language university courses.

Mr. Pelletier, who spoke recently at the opening of an ambulance dispatch building in Gatineau, said the university needs to recognize the Outaouais has a population of 53,000 anglophones and 249,000 francophones.

The statement is the first indication from a Quebec cabinet minister that the university should not exclude non-francophones.

For the past two months, the university has been consulting students, professors and the public about a proposed language policy that would end English-language MBA and graduate project administration programs for about 400 of its 5,500 students. The deadline for submissions is tomorrow.

Vincent Lamontagne, a spokesman for Mr. Pelletier, said this week that ultimately, the debate about language policy is an internal one.

"The university has to appear before the provincial government and show it is managing itself properly to obtain funding, but everything related to its policy is an internal matter — it is their decision."

Brian Gibb, the director of the Regional Association of West Quebecers, an English-language rights group, said he is pleased Mr. Pelletier has warned the university it must serve all Outaouais residents. He said Mr. Pelletier was reminding the university about its principal role in the community.

"This is an important development because we have somebody with political influence weighing in on the debate," Mr. Gibb said.

"I think his advice can't simply be ignored.

"Universities have to follow their mission. The university's letter of incorporation doesn't talk about promoting the French character of the Outaouais — it talks about making university education accessible to all people in the region."

Mr. Gibb said the majority of people who have submitted briefs to the university oppose the plan to eliminate English-language business courses. He said the original language policy proposed by an advisory

group at the university recommended English-language programs be allowed to continue in order to promote the university's international character.

Jean-Paul Perreault, the director of l'Impératif Français, an Outaouais French-language rights group, said the Université du Québec en Outaouais was created as a French-language university. He said its main responsibility is to serve a francophone population that has less access to university education than anglophones in Ottawa-Gatineau.

Mr. Perreault said anglophones receive 27.7 per cent of university funding in Quebec while they are only 8.4 per cent of the population.

As proof that francophones are educationally disadvantaged, Mr. Perreault cited Statistics Canada figures showing 43 per cent of Quebec anglophones fail standard literacy and numeracy tests compared with 55 per cent of francophones.

"The Outaouais has a deficit in terms of accessibility to university education for francophone students compared to anglophone students in the national capital region," he said.

"There are more than 100 university programs offered in English in the national capital region that are not available in French. What Mr. Pelletier needs to understand is that it is the francophone population of the Outaouais that needs help.

"It is the francophones of the Outaouais and Ontario who are the victims of discrimination when it comes to access to higher education."

Mr. Perreault said ending English-language university programs in Gatineau would help the Université du Québec en Outaouais budget and provide the resources to improve education for the francophone majority.

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School board calls province for budget help

Special assistance team will identify draft plan alternatives

BY MARIA KUBACKI

Facing a \$27.7-million funding shortfall for next year, Ottawa-Carleton District School Board trustees voted Tuesday to ask for the Ministry of Education's help in figuring out how to balance their budget.

Asking the province to set up a special assistance team will "open up dialogue with the ministry," and hopefully make the province to see "our situation really is as bad as we say it is," said board chairman Rob Campbell.

Special assistance teams work with school boards to "examine feasibility of the board's proposed budget plan and identify possible alternatives," said ministry spokeswoman Patricia MacNeil. Their recommendations are not binding, she said.

But another benefit of calling in a team is that it will provide the province with a more realistic understanding of the board's costs, said trustee Pam FitzGerald, who brought forward the motion to ask for the province's help.

"We want everyone to be on the same page and understand the problems we're facing," she said.

A number of other boards have also found themselves un-

able to balance budgets as a result of the province's flawed funding formula, which doesn't take into account the real costs of teachers' salaries and transportation, she said.

Among them is the Dufferin-Peel Catholic District School Board, which was taken over by a government-appointed overseer last week after trustees rejected a "co-management" plan to eliminate a \$7.5-million deficit.

Trustees at the Dufferin-Peel board made "all the cuts we possibly could without destroying our services," said Anna Abbruscato, the chairwoman of that board's administration and finance committee. "There isn't much left to cut."

By refusing to make the remaining \$7.5 million in reductions, the Dufferin-Peel board is now essentially under supervision, she says.

That's a scenario the Ottawa board wants to avoid. "I don't think there's a single trustee who'd like to usher in supervision," said Mr. Campbell, who

doesn't believe it will happen, but doesn't rule it out. "I can't guarantee it will be avoidable."

The board's shortfall is so big that last month board staff put forward a plan recommending the cuts — mainly in the areas of teaching staff, special education and transportation — be made over two years: \$18.9 million in 2007-08 and \$8.8 million in 2008-09.

Phasing in the cuts while leaving a deficit next year would technically be illegal without special permission from the province, since boards are required by law to present balanced budgets, Mr. Campbell said.

However, the province has allowed other boards to balance their budgets over several years. The Toronto Catholic District School Board, for instance, called in a special assistance team and, as a result, the province approved a multi-year plan to balance its 2007-2008 budget.

The OCDSB's decision to request a special assistance team is a "very proactive initiative," said trustee Riley Brockington, chairman of the board's budget committee.

The board has also put in a request to the province asking for permission for its own multi-year plan and is waiting for a response.

But as things stand, the board must produce a balanced budget for 2007-2008, which is why

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trustees are now asking staff for a plan to balance the budget in one year rather than two.

It's not known how quickly a team can be dispatched. But the board is up against a deadline to make a decision on the cutting of teaching positions.

Board staff is expected to release recommendations tomorrow that the board cut more than 200 teaching positions, which would translate into more than \$16 million in savings, said Mr. Brockington — a good chunk of the \$27.7-million shortfall.

Whatever trustees decide by the Feb. 27 deadline will "set the tone" for the budget process, said Mr. Brockington.

Ms. Abbruscato of the Dufferin-Peel board advises the Ottawa trustees to stick to their guns. "As elected representatives, they need to fight for what that they believe is the right decision for them," she said.

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Budget advice has pluses and minuses

LAURA CZEKAJ
Sun Media

Having a special assistance team dig into your school board's finances is like surgery — you avoid it if you can, but sometimes it's necessary, says the chairman of the Toronto Catholic school board.

"They were very helpful and they did push the limits of what staff thought was acceptable around timing, cash flow ... and the minister (of education) accepted their recommendations," Oliver Carroll said yesterday.

But in the same breath, Carroll said he isn't about to recommend the appointment of a team to other boards.

"When it's over and done with, these people were coming in to give us advice on how to balance our budget," he said. "Not everybody sees that as a positive experience."

The Ottawa-Carleton District School Board has decided to request such a team be pro-

vided by the province to help find the \$27.7 million in cost savings required to balance its 2007-08 budget.

The Toronto board found themselves in a bind last August when they couldn't reconcile the \$34.6 million in cuts they were being asked to make with their sense of serving their students.

Joint selection

At an impasse, the board agreed to the appointment of a special assistance team and the two members were jointly selected by the board and the education minister.

"They asked us to put forward a couple of names, people that we would be comfortable with coming in and giving us advice," he said.

The result was the joint selection of Mearl Obee and Fred Deacon, both of whom have extensive experience with school board issues.

"There wasn't a place in this board that they didn't look at,"

said Carroll.

At the end of three months, the team had worked with the board to develop a multi-year plan to balance the budget. The savings were found through attrition — not layoffs — postponing renewal projects and some purchases, and draining some of the floating pools of money set aside for filling staff positions.

The recommendations left the board "squeezed," but ultimately bought it time until the spring when new provincial grants could prevent some of the cuts from being made.

"It was with the hope that while agreeing to this, there would be some type of relief to come," said Carroll.

The Ottawa board is not in the same situation in that it's asking the team to be sent in early on in its deliberations. It is not mandatory that boards approve recommendations by the advisory team.

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L'Écho d'un peuple veut attirer les jeunes

Le Droit

La relance de *L'Écho d'un peuple* passera d'abord par la jeunesse.

La quatrième saison du spectacle à grand déploiement tentera d'attirer les jeunes élèves francophones de l'ensemble de l'Ontario lors des trois premières représentations du spectacle les 14, 15 et 16 juin prochains à la Ferme Drouin de Casselman.

« L'objectif est que tous les jeunes de la 7e année de l'Ontario voient le spectacle d'ici quelques années. Ils pourront revivre l'histoire franco-ontarienne en regardant *L'Écho* », a soutenu M^e Ronald Caza lors de sa première sortie publique en tant que président du conseil

d'administration de *L'Écho d'un peuple Inc.*

À son avis, il n'a rien de mieux qu'un tableau vivant des leçons apprises sur les bancs d'écoles pour développer, préserver et perpétuer sa culture et son identité franco-ontariennes.

En plus de cette invitation, quelques artisans du spectacle visiteront plusieurs écoles publiques et catholiques élémentaires et secondaires de la province d'ici la fin mars pour permettre aux jeunes de reproduire le spectacle à l'aide des costumes d'usage.

Hier, la tournée « *L'Écho de notre fierté* » — instiguée par le Conseil scolaire de district catholique de l'Est ontarien (CSDCEO) — visitait l'école élé-

mentaire catholique Montfort à Ottawa. Il s'agissait du 9^e arrêt sur les 35 écoles qui seront visitées.

Même si une telle activité sera jumelée à la promotion habituelle au sein des opérateurs de tours en province, M^e Caza n'a pu offrir de garanties quant au succès du spectacle.

« Ce sont les gens qui sont chez eux qui décideront. Les gens doivent se déplacer pour voir le spectacle.

« Chaque francophone doit acheter des billets ! », s'est-il exclamé tout en précisant que le but n'était pas de vendre des billets dans les écoles.

Un engagement généralisé des Francos de l'Ontario est plutôt souhaité.