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The importance of research in French in Canada

BRIEF FOR THE STANDING COMMITTEE ON SCIENCE
AND RESEARCH

GOVERNMENT OF CANADA

December 21, 2022

Located in Abitibi-Témiscamingue, in the heart of a region where Quebec's wide open spaces, lakes and forests stimulate creativity and emerging talent, the Université du Québec en Abitibi-Témiscamingue (UQAT) represents a driving force and a key element in Canada's scientific and economic development. Our university is established in Abitibi-Témiscamingue as well as northern Quebec, Nunavik, the Upper Laurentians, Montreal and the North Shore.

Since the creation of our fledgling university, we have been, and still are, **a key player in linking knowledge and applied research, and in technology transfer** to Canadian businesses.

*Given its **high volume of research**, our university is a major player in Canada because of its effectiveness in connecting companies with university research.*

Continuing with and boosting research activities in our internationally recognized areas of excellence will undoubtedly enable Canada to better position itself on the international scene.

By relying on a creative and daring strategy as well as the commitment of faculty members, students and the entire university community, UQAT has been able to **set itself apart** in research and research-creation and has acquired **a reputation that reaches far beyond the borders of the communities it serves**. Driven by intellectual curiosity and the desire to create benefits for society, UQAT researchers strive to advance knowledge by proposing effective solutions to complex problems.

Drawing on regional, national and international networks, associations with various communities, and numerous partnerships, the research and research-creation work carried out at UQAT is distinguished by both its excellence and its relevance.

Ranked 2nd in Canada among the top performing research universities according to Research Infosource,

*the **Université du Québec en Abitibi-Témiscamingue** has been helping our society to meet many challenges for nearly 40 years.*

In the longer term, UQAT supports its centres of excellence while promoting the development of new research and research-creation themes and fostering a positive, unifying and inclusive research culture that is shared by the entire university community. It provides a dynamic institutional environment conducive to the development of research in the humanities and social sciences, health sciences, research-creation and natural sciences and engineering, while taking into account the distinct missions and realities for each of the various sectors.

*The issue impacting the **development of scientific research in French in Canada** is **ever-present in our daily lives** and affects the development of our faculty, our university and our communities.*

This brief is a call for concerted action as well as a call for the Canadian government to take a clear position on tangible development of research in French.

THE IMPORTANCE OF PRESERVING AND DEVELOPING RESEARCH IN FRENCH IN CANADA

Research in French is crucial to the development and preservation of the French language in Canada. There are several reasons why it is important to preserve the French language. First, it is an important part of cultural identity and preserving the French language helps to preserve this part of Quebec’s cultural identity, but also that of countless Canadians who use the language on a daily basis.

The French language is part of humanity’s shared heritage and it is important to preserve it for future generations. It enables us to contribute to maintaining linguistic diversity in the world, which is essential to cultural richness. Thus, the Government of Canada, through its research granting agencies, has an important duty to support the preservation of this language—both for the country and the world’s heritage.

Research in French allows us to address linguistic and cultural issues, as well as learn about the practices and perspectives of francophones across the country. It also allows researchers to understand the cultural context and practices of francophones, which is essential for developing policies and practices that meet their needs. That is a major reason to support collecting the data required by the government; its policies and laws can be created based on the realities experienced by this Canadian language group.

Research in French also provides a better understanding of francophones’ cultural and linguistic heritage, which is important for developing a francophone culture and identity. Finally, research in French can contribute to the visibility of francophones in the world.

A SNAPSHOT OF RESEARCH IN FRENCH IN CANADA

In the summer of 2021, the Association canadienne-française pour l'avancement des sciences (Acfas) published a concerning overview of the state of research in French in Canada titled *Portraits et défis de la recherche en français en contexte minoritaire au Canada* [overview and challenges of research in French in a minority context in Canada] Here are some key data:

Academic journals

- In Canada, since 1960, only 8% of academic journals are created in French, 17% are bilingual and 76% are English.
- In Canada, there are 260 French or bilingual scholarly journals. Of these journals, 69 (26%) publish exclusively in French and 191 (69%) are bilingual. Additionally, 120 (46%) are housed in Quebec and 96 in Ontario (37%).
- In Quebec, 49% of scholarly journals are published exclusively in French, while 51% are bilingual.

Funding applications

- Within the three federal granting agencies and the CFI, between 5% and 12% of funding applications are written in French in Canada (while French-speaking researchers represent 21% of the total).

Funding application acceptance rates

- At CIHR, between 2001 and 2015, the success rate for English-language applications was higher than for French-language applications, *regardless of the language of the applicants*.
 - ✓ Success rate, in English, submitted by anglophones: 38.6%
 - ✓ Success rate, in English, submitted by francophones: 37%
 - ✓ Success rate, in French, submitted by francophones: 30.3%
 - ✓ Success rate, in French, submitted by anglophones: 24.8%

This data concerns us and compels us to propose concrete actions to rectify the situation.

UQAT RECOMMENDATIONS FOR DEVELOPING RESEARCH IN FRENCH

RECOMMENDATION 1:

RECONSIDER THE COMPOSITION OF REVIEW COMMITTEES AND THE CRITERIA FOR EVALUATING FUNDING APPLICATIONS SO THAT RESEARCHERS HAVE A REAL OPPORTUNITY TO SUBMIT THEIR APPLICATIONS IN FRENCH

The data show that francophone researchers submit their funding applications in English, even though they can technically do so in either language. Thus, the composition of the review committees (insufficient mastery of French) and the evaluation criteria used **discourage** and suggest discrimination against researchers who submit their applications and publish in French.

Proposals:

- Reconsider the bilingualism assessment of review committee members to ensure French language and technical competence.
- Add formal incentives to the assessment process for researchers to submit their applications in French, for example, by setting certain quotas for grants for applications written in French.
- Make it possible for researchers to apply for funding in French, even if they will eventually publish in English.

RECOMMENDATION 2:

IN THE SOCIAL SCIENCES AND HUMANITIES, REVIEW EVALUATION CRITERIA TO PROMOTE PUBLISHING IN FRENCH AND RESEARCHING ISSUES OF LOCAL RELEVANCE

With the growing importance of the impact factor (IF) as a determinant of career paths in research, even in the social sciences and humanities, the incentive to publish in high IF journals is becoming stronger.

To be published in these journals, researchers must therefore publish in English and focus on subjects of interest to the English-speaking or international community. In doing so, they neglect both their language and their society, and they deprive knowledgeable francophone users of access to work that could contribute to improving their practices and their understanding of social and cultural realities that are specific to them.

Proposals:

- Limit the weighting of the impact factor as an evaluation criterion in the social sciences and humanities.
- Add formal incentives in the evaluation process for social sciences and humanities researchers to work and publish in French.
- Add formal incentives in the evaluation process for social sciences and humanities researchers to study locally relevant topics.

RECOMMENDATION 3:

SUPPORT THE DISSEMINATION OF SCIENTIFIC KNOWLEDGE IN FRENCH BY MAINTAINING FUNDING FOR *ÉRUDIT* AND BY FUNDING FRANCOPHONE JOURNALS

The Quebec platform *Érudit* was created 25 years ago thanks to investments from the Université de Montréal, Université Laval and UQAM. It hosts and disseminates articles in the humanities and social sciences, the majority of which are in French. It is also funded by the Government of Quebec and the Government of Canada through the Canada Foundation for Innovation (CFI) and the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC). *Érudit* collaborates with over 200 journals and offers 140,000 articles, most of which are open access. Every year, 34 million downloads are made, 2/3 of which are from abroad.

This Quebec infrastructure is a major player in the dissemination of science in French on a global scale. However, the funding it receives from the federal government must be periodically renewed.

Proposals:

- Recognize *Érudit* as an essential infrastructure and channel funding through Canadian Heritage rather than through CFI.
- Provide sustainable and predictable funding for *Érudit* to ensure the platform's long-term survival.
- Enhance funding for francophone scientific journals.

**RECOMMENDATION 4:
IMPOSE FUNDING QUOTAS FOR FRENCH-LANGUAGE RESEARCH ACTIVITIES ON
GRANTING AGENCIES**

Quotas for francophone content exist at Telefilm Canada and the Conseil des arts et des lettres in order to ensure that francophone culture is represented.

In science and research, equity, diversity and inclusion criteria impose representation quotas for certain underrepresented groups (women, visible minorities, people with disabilities and Indigenous people) in the allocation process for Canada Research Chairs.

Proposals:

- In light of the data demonstrating the gross under-representation of French in funding applications and scientific publications, recognize francophones as an underrepresented minority in the research field;
- Impose funding quotas on granting agencies for research conducted with francophone populations that will result in French-language publications.

**RECOMMENDATION 5:
FUND THE FRENCH RESEARCH ASSISTANCE SERVICE (SARF)**

In November 2021, the Government of Quebec committed to funding the creation of the Service d'aide à la recherche en français (SARF), whose fundamental objective is to work towards the substantive equality of francophones and anglophones in the research environment across Canada.

To this end, SARF will provide support to researchers who, at various stages of the research process, require resources to work in their mother tongue. SARF is led by Acfas.

The federal government has not yet committed to financially supporting this service. As it stands, Quebec is funding the protection of French across Canada.

Proposal:

- That the federal government announce financial support for SARF in order to support francophone researchers **across Canada**.

**SUMMARY OF UQAT RECOMMENDATIONS TO PRESERVE AND DEVELOP
RESEARCH IN FRENCH IN CANADA**

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OVERVIEW OF UQAT

The Université du Québec en Abitibi-Témiscamingue (UQAT) is a human, creative and daring francophone university that has demonstrated an incredible energy for teaching, research and creation for nearly 40 years.

With its resources, its accessibility, openness, partnerships and propensity for innovation, UQAT creates, transmits and mobilizes a wide variety of knowledge and contributes to skill development in order to help individuals and communities grow, both in its home regions, as well as on a national and international scale.

- Committed to shaping the future together with Indigenous groups
- Open to the world with UQAT International
- 3 campuses, 4 centres and one point of service
- More than 150 professors
- More than 6,600 students
- More than 150 undergraduate and graduate programs
- 16 research chairs

Five themes of excellence highlight the fields in which UQAT stands out mainly through the intensity and impact of its research and research-creation activities. They represent the main avenues of development for the research and research-creation sector at UQAT.

- Environment and sustainable future
- Creativity and new technologies
- Indigenous knowledge
- Communities and regional knowledge
- Global health