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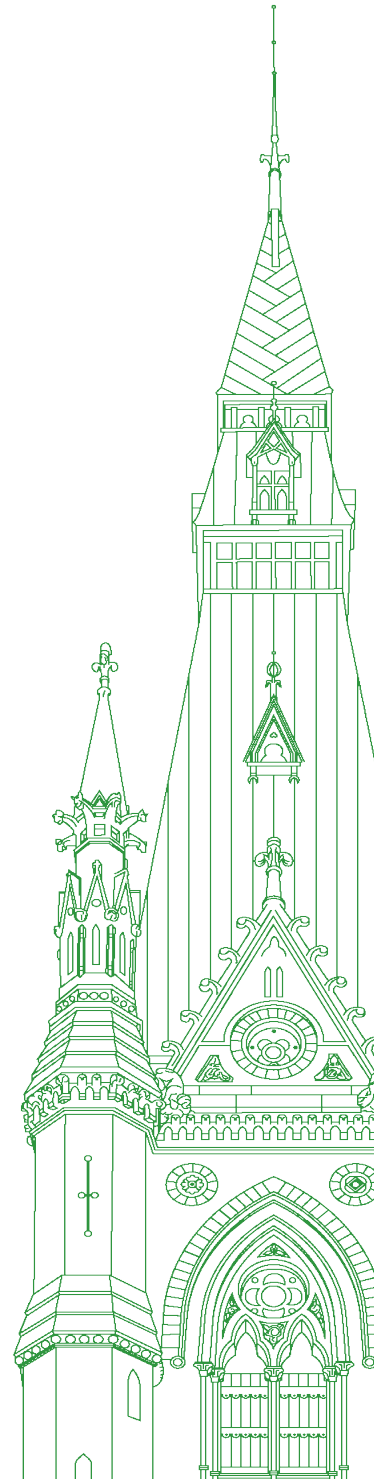
Standing Committee on Science and Research

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Chair: Salma Zahid



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• (1105)

[English]

The Chair (Salma Zahid (Scarborough Centre—Don Valley East, Lib.)): I call this meeting to order.

I would like to welcome everybody back to the committee. I hope everyone had a good summer.

Welcome to meeting number 43 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Science and Research. We are meeting today to commence our study on the report of the external advisory panel on the creation and dissemination of scientific information in French.

Today's meeting is taking place in a hybrid format, pursuant to the Standing Orders. Members are attending in person in the room and remotely using the Zoom application.

Before we continue, I would ask all in-person participants to consult the guidelines written on the cards on the table. These measures are in place to help prevent audio and feedback incidents, and to protect the health and safety of all participants, including our amazing interpreters. You will notice a QR code on the card, which links to a short awareness video.

I would like to make a few comments for the benefit of the witnesses and all of the members.

Please wait until I recognize you by name before speaking. For those participating by video conference, click on the microphone icon to activate your mic, and please mute yourself when you're not speaking. For those on Zoom, at the bottom of your screen, you can select the appropriate channel for interpretation: floor, English or French. For those in the room, you can use the earpiece and select the desired channel.

I would like to remind witnesses that committee members may ask questions in either French or English. If you will need interpretation, please take a moment now to prepare your earpiece and select the listening channel you need in advance in order to take full advantage of the time allotted for questions and answers.

As a reminder, all comments should be addressed through the chair. For members in the room, if you wish to speak, please raise your hand. For members on Zoom, please use the "raise hand" function. The clerk and I will manage the speaking order as best we can, and we appreciate your patience and understanding in this regard.

With that, I would like to welcome our witnesses for today.

We are joined by Acfas, the Association francophone pour le savoir and Martin Maltais, president by video conference. We are also joined by Sophie Montreuil, executive director. Our second witness for today is from the Association of Canadian University Presses. We have David Larsen, president.

Welcome to this committee. You will have five minutes for your opening remarks, and then we will start with the rounds of questioning.

We will start with Mr. Maltais, the president of Acfas. Please go ahead. You have five minutes for your opening remarks.

Martin Maltais (President, Acfas – Association francophone pour le savoir): Thanks, Madam Chair and members of the committee, for receiving us again today.

I am Martin Maltais, the president of Acfas and a professor at the Université du Québec à Rimouski. With me is Sophie Montreuil, our executive director.

For 103 years, Acfas has been advancing knowledge in French across the country. In its report, the external advisory panel mentions our French-language research support service, the SARF, exactly twice. Both times, it is in the diagnosis and never in the recommendations. It is this gap that we intend to bridge today.

[Translation]

On page 30 of its report, the advisory panel explains that the "action" taken to create the SARF is a "step in the right direction". On page 52, it commends Ottawa's decision to fund the SARF for the duration of the current action plan for official languages, which ends in 18 months, on March 31, 2028.

Both observations are accurate. However, between the assessment and the 12 measures outlined in the report, the SARF doesn't come up at all, and none of the measures mention it.

We certainly don't intend to correct the advisory panel's report. On the contrary, we publicly endorsed it in a press release the day after it came out. What we're saying here, in fact, is that its implementation can begin now using a mechanism that already exists.

Ms. Montreuil will explain what lies behind these two points and then propose two recommendations.

Sophie Montreuil (Executive Director, Acfas – Association francophone pour le savoir): The report notes that there is no monitoring mechanism to assess the impact of measures to encourage the submission of applications in French. However, at the Service d'aide à la recherche en français, or SARF, we have that data. In three years, there have been 19 agreements with institutions in six provinces, as well as 60 revised grant applications with an excellent 30% success rate. Behind these figures is a team of three and, above all, a network of 75 advisers and vice-presidents of research at partner universities, most of whom are unilingual anglophones.

The report also found that the initiatives of the three granting agencies remain fragmented. The SARF is precisely what connects them on the ground. In fact, we've just signed an agreement on it with the Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada, or NSERC, and we will be entering into agreements with the other two councils in the coming weeks.

Another important point is that the francophone lens proposed in recommendation 1 is taking hold in the English-language universities of the Canadian network. We don't need to wait for the research in French support and promotion fund or the Secretariat for the Coordination of Research in French to be set up to collectively roll up our sleeves, because we're not starting from scratch. The federal government itself recognized the relevance of the SARF in a press release issued by Canadian Heritage on November 20, 2025.

At Acfas, we state loud and clear that the SARF is in itself a positive measure within the meaning of the Official Languages Act. It acts as an operator at the local institutional level, that is to say where the practices, processes and support mechanisms for research are actually structured.

Two measures can be implemented within the current structures.

First, a transitional budget allocation could be established for the three granting agencies, specifically for research in French, through two pilot programs: "Francophone Missions" for grants and "Emerging Talent" for graduate scholarships. Your committee can ask the three granting agencies right away which existing programs could incorporate a pilot component. These pilot programs could easily be carried out jointly with Acfas and the SARF.

Second, we could ensure the long-term sustainability of funding for the SARF by integrating it into the research in French support and promotion fund. Again, the SARF's funding ends in 2028. Its long-term funding must therefore be explicitly included in the support fund's programming.

The SARF will require \$600,000 per year once the action plan for official languages 2023–2028 is completed. This is quite modest given the cultural shift that is currently taking place, thanks to the SARF, within Canadian institutions of higher education.

Our government is on the right track, even if its efforts are considered timid by our community. Its primary responsibility is to implement the recommendations made by 10 experts and 160 stakeholders in the research ecosystem.

• (1110)

[English]

The Chair: Thanks a lot.

We will now proceed to the Association of Canadian University Presses. I request the president, Mr. Larsen, to please go ahead.

You will have five minutes for your opening remarks.

David Larsen (President, Association of Canadian University Presses): Thank you, Madam Chair.

It's an honour and privilege to be invited before the House of Commons Standing Committee on Science and Research on behalf of the Association of Canadian University Presses for its study of the report of the external advisory panel on the creation and dissemination of scientific information in French.

The Association of Canadian University Presses welcomes the report of the external advisory group on the creation and dissemination of scientific information in French and in particular the recommendations set out in the chapter on scholarly communications in French.

The report highlights "an unequivocal finding: in Canada, as elsewhere, English has come to dominate scholarly communications." It says, "To secure the future of research in French, it is not enough to produce that research; the research must also be made visible, discoverable and accessible." It also states that "a coordinated and sustainable strategy is required for the Canadian scientific Francophonie to regain its vitality and place in the international dissemination of knowledge. Such a strategy would serve to address the three challenges—normative, financial, and organizational—[that were] identified" in the report.

The report notably underscores the challenges related to the funding of scholarly publishing and insufficient support available in Canada for the translation of research. Among other measures, it highly recommends increasing funding for the awards to scholarly publications program administered by the Canadian Federation for the Humanities and Social Sciences. Grants from the program have not increased for the past 20 years. It also recommends funding a national scholarly book translation program and establishing a scholarly publishing support program that includes grants specifically designed for university presses operating in minority-language contexts.

There is, as well, an identified need for dissemination platforms that bring together French-language scholarly publishers to improve content discoverability. Improving websites, metadata management and search engine visibility requires dedicated funding. Additionally, while open access is laudable and widely pursued, publishing business models still fundamentally depend on revenue generated through book sales.

Canadian scholarly publishers serve Canadian scholars in their reach of domestic and international audiences with exceptional world-class books that present the world with the best of Canadian scholarship. Our publishing programs are committed to the highest standards of peer-reviewed publication. We strive to maintain our place at the international forefront of technological development and adoption; however, technological developments are evolving at an exponential pace, creating an urgent need for funding, training and public policy support. The cost of producing scholarly books continues to increase year after year.

There is a lack of government funding specifically dedicated to scholarly book publishing. Given the significant financial challenges currently facing Canadian university presses, ACUP calls on the Government of Canada to move quickly to implement the recommendations of the external advisory panel.

The Association of Canadian Presses is the national voice of Canada's French- and English-language scholarly publishers. The association represents 18 members, three bilingual presses, four French-language presses and 11 English-language presses. ACUP promotes the exchange of ideas on scholarly publishing in Canada and serves as a vital source of publishing expertise and support for learned societies, post-secondary institutions, governments, researchers, the media and the public.

Thank you.

• (1115)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Larsen.

With that, we will now start our first round of questioning with six minutes each. We will begin with MP Baldinelli.

Please go ahead for six minutes.

Tony Baldinelli (Niagara Falls—Niagara-on-the-Lake, CPC): Thank you, Madam Chair.

It's good to see all my colleagues. Hopefully everyone had a good summer.

Before we begin, Madam Chair, I want to convey our collective good wishes on this side, our sense of relief and, more importantly, our support to you and your family following what you had to endure this summer. We're very glad that you're here and that you and your family are safe and doing well. Also, by the way, congratulations on your son's wedding. Finally, we're glad that you're here and chairing this meeting today.

To begin, I'm going to go to our witnesses.

I'm going to go to Acfas, Mr. Maltais.

First of all, thanks to the analysts for preparing an excellent brief.

What you quickly realize after going through the brief is that a lot of reports have been prepared and recommendations made touching on the need to improve support for research and scientific research publications in French, including from this committee.

Acfas appeared before the House of Commons Standing Committee on Science and Research in October 2022 as part of its study

on the support for research and scientific publication in French. During this appearance, the president of Acfas stated this:

...there is a lack of confidence in the granting councils in Canada. There is also a lack of financing for scholarly journals, scientific activities in French and groups that provide leadership in these communities. And last, there is a lack of recognition.

Mr. Maltais, were you the president at the time? Was this your quote, or was that the quote of a predecessor of yours?

[Translation]

Martin Maltais: No, I fully stand by that quote.

[English]

Tony Baldinelli: The reason I ask is simply that most of the members on this committee are new and did not participate in that study a few years ago. For our benefit, can you please explain why the president of Acfas lacked confidence in the granting councils in Canada at that time?

[Translation]

Martin Maltais: You're framing the question around the lack of confidence in the granting agencies. However, it must be understood that we have a very good relationship with these organizations.

However, what must be understood is that, across the country, the current issues go far beyond the mere idea of a linguistic or cultural struggle. The broader issue concerns the reality in Canada, where approximately 23% of the population is French-speaking, while the proportion of francophone scientists is well below 23%. In fact, it's currently below 21%, according to the latest analyses. This means that measures must be taken—in terms of the allocation of funds for scientific research—to prioritize scientific output in French and to increase the number of francophone scientific researchers in the country. This is a fundamentally economic issue that affects prosperity, particularly in the current context of strategic repositioning on the international stage.

Under the current structure, and given the discretion of research funding agencies, the Government of Canada must take steps to direct certain funds allocated to scientific research through guidelines that guarantee funding for research and scientific output in French exceeds 23% across all fields of scientific research. We're saying that this figure should be above 25% to gradually bring the target closer to 23% and generate benefits for the Canadian economy. Currently, scientific output in French in Canada falls short of this level.

So it's not just a cultural or linguistic issue. It's a fundamental issue for the country's economy and prosperity.

[English]

Tony Baldinelli: Thank you for that.

In fact, I want to go back, because the report written and tabled by this committee three years ago touched on issues with the tri-agencies. Since that time, and with some of the concerns you've expressed right now, has the government taken steps to address some of those issues? Have those funding issues over that three-year period been addressed and addressed to your satisfaction?

• (1120)

[Translation]

Sophie Montreuil: May I continue, Mr. Chair?

Martin Maltais: Yes, if you want, go ahead.

Sophie Montreuil: The answer is yes, because the three granting agencies have officially committed to supporting Acfas and its French-language research assistance service. We signed an official agreement with NSERC last May, and we will sign official agreements with the other two agencies in the coming weeks. We have already been working closely with all three agencies for several years, ever since the SARF was created.

There is one other point I want to add to your background information. Since 2023, a significant game changer has occurred in Canada: the new Official Languages Act, which came into force in June 2023. You're familiar with the act, including part VII, which establishes new obligations for all federal government bodies, including granting agencies, of course. These bodies are now required to implement positive measures to counteract the decline in French-language research and, above all, to avoid implementing any negative measures.

Is this why the three agencies have accelerated the pace of change? That may well be, but we're seeing these changes in concrete terms.

[English]

Tony Baldinelli: Thank you for that. That was going to be my follow-up question.

You mentioned that you had reached—

The Chair: We have to move forward.

Tony Baldinelli: I'll come back.

The Chair: Yes, I'll come back to you.

Mr. Baldinelli, I really appreciate your support and concern. Thank you for the call you made that day. It was very heartwarming to see the love and support coming from all our colleagues. Thank you.

We will now proceed to MP Deschênes-Thériault for six minutes.

Please go ahead.

[Translation]

Guillaume Deschênes-Thériault (Madawaska—Restigouche, Lib.): Thank you very much, Madam Chair.

My first question is for the Acfas representatives.

The Service d'aide à la recherche en français, or SARF, which receives part of its funding from the federal government, has been under your responsibility since it was established.

I'd like to know how the SARF serves as a concrete tool for supporting research in French and, more broadly, how funding an initiative like the SARF actually helps ensure the viability of French within Canada's scientific research ecosystem.

Sophie Montreuil: I can start by answering the first question, and then you can continue, Mr. Maltais.

Martin Maltais: Go ahead, Ms. Montreuil, no problem.

Sophie Montreuil: That's kind of you.

On the issue of being a concrete tool, I'll go back to a few figures I mentioned in my speech.

The SARF was officially established on May 12, 2023.

[English]

It's been a little more than three years now.

[Translation]

This is a new and unheard of service. There's nothing like it anywhere else in Canada or abroad. However, I'll tell you where things stand three and a half years later, and you'll agree that things have happened very quickly. In our opinion, that's because it's meeting a need. Three years and a few months later, we have 19 partnership agreements signed with Canadian universities across the country, except in Quebec, because this service is not intended for Quebec universities. The majority of these universities are English-language: Simon Fraser University, University of British Columbia, University of Regina, University of Saskatchewan and others. We have negotiated agreements to support francophone researchers at English-language universities. We have successfully entered into 19 agreements. This demonstrates that institutions are committed to supporting their French-language scientific communities and taking meaningful action.

I've cited a few figures, but I can provide further details. For example, 63 grant applications were reviewed by our small team before being submitted to the granting agencies, and they had a 30% success rate. We don't guarantee success. Obviously, that's the prerogative of the evaluation committees within the granting councils. However, we do guarantee to the partner university that their researchers are submitting quality applications in French.

Guillaume Deschênes-Thériault: So, if I understand correctly, this is a mechanism that truly supports research in French in English-language institutions across the country.

Sophie Montreuil: It does, in a very real and tangible way.

Guillaume Deschênes-Thériault: How do you see the existing SARF aligning with the other measures proposed in the report? I'm thinking in particular of the establishment of a secretariat.

In your remarks, you also mentioned a transitional budget allocation for the SARF.

Can you elaborate on those points, that is to say alignment and the transitional budget allocation, which you alluded to?

• (1125)

Martin Maltais: Maybe I'll just talk about the transitional budget allocation, and then you can finish with—

Sophie Montreuil: Okay, you can talk about the allocation, and then I'll keep the question about alignment.

[English]

The Chair: It's one person at a time.

Go ahead.

[Translation]

Sophie Montreuil: I'm going to talk about alignment.

I'll be brief and say that our concern is that the existing service will be sidelined in favour of an equivalent service that would be created within the new secretariat, which would result in a disruption in service to the community several years from now.

The two organizations—the secretariat and the SARF—operate on different scales. They are distinct instruments. Their objectives, however, are aligned. The secretariat is a compliance mechanism within the government apparatus. It's an organization we absolutely need. We fully support the recommendation to establish this secretariat. The SARF, in contrast, is an on-the-ground operator within institutions.

We can conclude by saying that the secretariat can't change the rules on its own. The SARF is already effecting change. A culture of change has taken hold, and we must ensure that the two organizations work together and don't simply duplicate each other's efforts. We have a winning formula on three fronts: It's a win for the institutions; it's a win for researchers, students and professors; and it's a win for the granting agencies, which are seeing an increase in the number of applications submitted in French every year.

Martin Maltais: With respect to the transitional budget allocation, it's important to understand that we're perfectly happy to play this role as an operator through the SARF. Yes, being so well received on the ground at universities across the country has enabled us to strengthen our relationships in Alberta, Manitoba, eastern Canada, Ontario and everywhere else, from coast to coast to coast. However, it must be clearly understood that we see the transitional funding we're requesting as one step among other steps to come. We've now demonstrated the concept's viability. There will be other steps. Latent demand is much greater. I wouldn't be surprised if, within five to 10 or 15 years, the growth in demand far exceeds our capacity and we may need to look at other scenarios. Does that mean that we'll end up outsourcing the activity? Will we need to set aside additional budget allocations for this in the future? The demand is there, and the potential for this type of platform to enhance scientific discourse in French is extremely significant.

Guillaume Deschênes-Thériault: Do I have any time left?

[English]

The Chair: You have seven seconds.

[Translation]

Guillaume Deschênes-Thériault: Thank you very much. We can continue on my next turns.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you, MP Deschênes-Thériault.

Now we will proceed to MP Blanchette-Joncas for six minutes. Please go ahead.

[Translation]

Maxime Blanchette-Joncas (Rimouski-Neigette—Mitis—Matapédia—Les Basques, BQ): Thank you, Madam Chair.

I'd like to welcome the witnesses who are with us for this important study.

My first question is for Mr. Maltais, from Acfas.

This isn't the first time we've met on the issue of science in French.

Since 2021, there have been several reports, including one by Acfas entitled “Portrait and Challenges of Research in French in the Minority Context in Canada”. This committee, the Standing Committee on Science and Research, produced a report in 2023 entitled “Revitalizing Research and Scientific Publication in French in Canada”. There was also the report entitled “Report of the Advisory Panel on the Federal Research Support System”, commonly known as the Bouchard report, and its recommendation 21, which talks about the need for support for research in French. Now, we have another report, released in 2026, entitled “Research in French and Substantive Equality: An Opportunity”, which again highlights fragmented governance and the lack of a comprehensive strategy.

In your opinion, do we still need assessments, or is it now federal implementation that is lacking?

Martin Maltais: I won't tell you that federal implementation is lacking. I would say that we've reached the stage where we need to implement all of the measures. As Ms. Montreuil pointed out earlier, some measures have already been put in place recently. The SARF is one such measure that is currently active.

Furthermore, we have not implemented any major or overly ambitious measures, to avoid finding ourselves in a situation where we would be unable to respond to significant demand or growth. We first conducted a proof of concept. We built relationships. We saw that there was demand and interest in this type of support. Now, we're in a growth phase.

You have to view this as an approach that's also somewhat entrepreneurial—I'll put it that way—because there's a scaling-up phase, meaning gradual expansion, that must not be overlooked when moving forward with initiatives like this. I sincerely believe that moving too quickly would likely have led us to make a number of mistakes. Today, we have all the information we need.

It's clear that if you asked me this question again in two, three, or four years and we were still exactly where we are now, then I could tell you that we're lagging behind in implementing these measures. However, at this stage, we're in the right place at the right time to take the right steps.

• (1130)

Maxime Blanchette-Joncas: I'd like to follow up on the implementation.

In a public statement issued by Acfas on November 5 following the 2025 federal budget, you said the following:

To build a strong Canada, we need a strong scientific community in both of our country's languages. It is time for the government to recognize that science in French is also a strategic asset. Through this budget, the government is not sending a clear signal to the French-speaking research community, thereby leaving questions hanging regarding its political will to establish true equality in the research community...

The report indicates that this is a statement by Martin Maltais, president of Acfas.

I would like to discuss some recent initiatives.

In its recent budget, the federal government also announced \$1.7 billion to attract researchers, particularly from the United States. Of the first 64 chairs awarded, only eight are at French-language universities. So, eight out of 64 is 12.5%.

In your opinion, is this an initiative that is truly positive for achieving real equality for French-language science in Canada?

Martin Maltais: Regarding this issue, it's important to understand that the initiative to recruit world-class researchers was launched at a slightly earlier stage. So, we can understand what's happening. Would it be normal to expect the same kind of result in the future for similar measures? In this case, I would say no.

Ms. Montreuil, I'll let you continue. I think you wanted to say something.

Sophie Montreuil: Indeed, as you rightly pointed out, there are currently no measures in place, aside from funding for a service that happens to be managed by Acfas.

I'd like to follow up on what you said, which is very important. The expert panel was created by the federal government following work in which you, among others, participated, on the issue of science and research in French. That was years ago. Funding was allocated in the 2023–28 action plan for official languages. The government honoured its commitment: it established an expert panel composed of eight experts from across the country, and 165 individuals and organizations were consulted. The assessment is now complete.

The government, now—and here I'm offering a very simple, even simplistic, interpretation—has a single obligation: to honour the work it paid for and commissioned experts to carry out.

So, when you ask whether now is the time to implement it, the answer is that it is certainly time for implementation. Mr. Maltais said that if, in a year or two, we see that nothing is happening, that will be a different story. I don't know what we'll do. However, this isn't a matter of a year or two; it needs to be done quickly. The government has an obligation to honour the work it itself commissioned experts to carry out. The decline and the needs are evident across the entire spectrum: creation, dissemination and publication. Failing to take the report's assessment and recommendations seriously will pose a huge problem for the scientific community and the organizations that represent it.

Maxime Blanchette-Joncas: All right. I must continue, Ms. Montreuil.

As for me, I'm looking for the positive aspects. In its brief submitted to the Standing Committee on Science and Research regard-

ing the allocation of funding for post-secondary institutions in Canada, Acfas called for a minimum of 25% to be earmarked specifically for scientific research in French and for French-language universities. Now, you're being given 12.5%.

You said that under the Official Languages Act, which was modernized in 2023, the government is required to implement affirmative action measures. You're asking for at least 25%, and you're being given 12.5%. I'm trying to see what's positive about that.

Martin Maltais: We requested it, but the government has not made a decision yet. Furthermore, the process was already under way.

Now, I may well be surprised or disappointed that a desired target has not been met at this point, but these things happened simultaneously.

If, following this committee's work, you recommend reaching a target of 25% or more, or at least 25%—

[English]

The Chair: I'm sorry for interrupting. Could you wind up your answer quickly?

[Translation]

Martin Maltais: If guidance like that were provided, it would be wonderful.

Maxime Blanchette-Joncas: Madam Chair, would it be possible to receive a more detailed response in writing? That would allow them to—

[English]

The Chair: Yes.

MP Blanchette-Joncas would like to have a written response to this question. Could you please provide that, Mr. Maltais?

• (1135)

[Translation]

Martin Maltais: All right.

[English]

The Chair: Okay. That would be good.

We will now start our second round of questioning.

MP Godin, welcome to the committee. You have five minutes for your round of questioning.

[Translation]

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

Thank you, colleagues. This is my first time here at the Standing Committee on Science and Research, and I'm very pleased to be here.

Ms. Montreuil and Mr. Maltais, listening to you, everything seems to be going well—everything is positive. That's the message I'm getting this morning. However, I'm not sure we're on the right track.

I am responsible for official languages within my party and I serve on the Standing Committee on Official Languages. I would like to correct what you said earlier, Ms. Montreuil. You said that the new Official Languages Act has been in effect since June 2023. Actually, that is true, but it is not entirely true.

Sophie Montreuil: The regulations are missing.

Joël Godin: Several regulations are missing. What year is it? It's 2026. It's been three years. So, when it comes to priorities, I'm not sure the current federal government can demonstrate that it cares about francophones across Canada. That was just the appetizer.

Ms. Montreuil, you mentioned earlier that you had 19 agreements with francophone universities. You said that you had submitted or helped submit 63 applications for financial assistance and that your success rate was 30%.

In my opinion, a 30% success rate means you're failing. So how can we celebrate a 30% success rate? That's my first question, Ms. Montreuil.

Sophie Montreuil: First of all, there aren't 19 agreements with French-language universities.

Joël Godin: These are English-language universities.

Sophie Montreuil: There are 19 agreements with Canadian universities outside of Quebec, most of which are anglophone institutions. I think it's 11 plus eight.

I'm trying to organize my response.

Second, the mission of the Service d'aide à la recherche en français, the French-language research support service, is not to guarantee the success of a submitted application. That is the prerogative of the evaluation committees, and it depends, in particular, on discipline-specific requirements. The SARF's role is to enable a professor at an English-language institution who wants to carry out a project in French to submit their application in French, so they don't have to write it in English and then translate it, which would take twice as long.

The SARF is a team of three people. When we started, there was just one person. Our numbers are growing.

Is this a small number of applications compared to the total number of applications submitted to the three councils? Without a doubt, that is the case. I don't even have the exact figure. However, what we need to realize is that each of these applications would likely never have been submitted without the SARF.

Joël Godin: I see. Thank you, Ms. Montreuil.

Martin Maltais: If I may, I would like to give a simple answer to your question. When we say that the success rate is 30% for grant applications drafted by the SARF or for which the SARF has provided support, it is important to understand that the success rate with funding bodies is always below 30% across all universities in the country. One in five or one in six applications is funded.

Joël Godin: Thank you.

Martin Maltais: So, when we say we're reaching 30%, that's actually higher than what's found elsewhere.

Joël Godin: I see.

Martin Maltais: We are twice as successful as others in other contexts.

Joël Godin: That's fine. The aim was not to criticize your support service. It was much more a question of examining the eligibility criteria.

Is there a favourable assessment when applications are submitted in French?

Sophie Montreuil: To answer the question briefly, I would say that the assessment committees are not unilingual. The committees assess grant applications in both English and French that relate to the relevant academic discipline, of course. This requires bilingualism on the part of the members of the assessment committee, because understanding a 25-page grant application is not the same as reading a newspaper article. Is the level of bilingualism always up to scratch? It is a question worth asking.

The problem has been observed across all three councils, and it is their responsibility to remedy it.

Joël Godin: It is important to understand that...

I'll let you have a quick word, Mr. Maltais.

Martin Maltais: The simplest solution to the question you are raising is that funding should be allocated to French-language applications within granting councils, in addition to an obligation. When we say 25%—

Joël Godin: I must interrupt you, Mr. Maltais.

Martin Maltais: No, but if you want to achieve a growth target, that's the one. The other route—

Joël Godin: I understand.

Mr. Maltais, there may be another way: Perhaps we should prioritize French. If the government has the will and the intention to promote both official languages, including French, which is the most vulnerable, there may be a way to change the criteria to ensure we are more effective, as there is some catching up to do. However, I do not sense this in the process.

Can you confirm that for me?

• (1140)

Sophie Montreuil: The report recommends a budget of \$40 million, split into two amounts—\$30 million and \$10 million—for specific programs. Earlier, we spoke about students in particular. That needs to be done. If it isn't done, the system in its current state—which has been built up over several years, or even decades—will not be able to meet demand.

I don't think there is any ill will. A dedicated budget will solve a large part of the problem.

Joël Godin: However, you do realize that—

[English]

The Chair: Your time is up, Mr. Godin.

[Translation]

Joël Godin: Thank you, Madam Chair.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you.

We will now proceed to MP Noormohamed for five minutes.

[Translation]

Taleeb Noormohamed (Vancouver Granville, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Chair.

I'll begin with Ms. Montreuil.

I have noted with interest that an increasing number of French-speaking researchers are working at English-language institutions, such as the University of British Columbia and Simon Fraser University. This is of particular interest to me, as I am from British Columbia. Furthermore, the quality of their research is exceptional, which comes as no surprise.

Despite this, I am struck by the preference given to English, and, even more significantly, by the fact that publishing in English is seen as a greater mark of excellence than publishing in French.

In your view, what explains this situation, and how can it be remedied?

Sophie Montreuil: How much time are you giving me?

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Taleeb Noormohamed: I have four minutes, but you may take one minute to answer the question.

Sophie Montreuil: I'll answer that briefly.

There are far more French-speaking researchers and students in English-language institutions than people realize. Given that we live in a bilingual country and that universities also have obligations, it is only natural that these people should wish to submit applications in French. This is excellent research. Excellent research—at the very least—is being carried out in both languages in Canada.

Why are applications submitted in English? It is simply because no one at the university is able to comment on an application in French. The staff are not bilingual. We therefore remedy the situation by operating as a separate research office. However, we work in accordance with the university's standards, and it works.

Why is publishing in English still, even today, seen as a mark of excellence? That, too, needs to change. There are discipline-specific issues at play. People generally publish much more in English in the natural sciences and engineering. We should be publishing more in French when it comes to health issues and the humanities and social sciences, but that's a different matter altogether.

That ties in somewhat with what you were saying, Mr. Godin. How do we currently assess research excellence? We rely far too heavily on the publication of articles in high-impact English-language journals. If we were to assess excellence in a different way—notably by looking at the real-world impact of French-language research on the population, on a community or on a health issue, and by awarding points for public outreach—we might enable more researchers outside the U15 consortium to access research funding to carry out research that is just as relevant as that conducted at the major institutions.

I could go on.

Taleeb Noormohamed: I have another question. After that, I shall hand over the remainder of my speaking time to my colleague, Mr. Deschênes-Thériault.

The issue of perception is very interesting to me. It applies to French, but perhaps it could also apply to other languages in other countries. Here in Canada, it is very important to accept that there is a problem of perception.

In the course of our work as MPs, whether someone speaks in French or English, it is the same to us, the languages are on a level playing field. We judge our colleagues by the words they use, not by the language they use.

In research, if there is a problem relating to the people who evaluate the research, that is one thing. That said, does the issue of perception in the academic world also persist elsewhere in the world, or is it a problem unique to Canada?

Sophie Montreuil: I think the president of Acfas might wish to speak. As a professor, he is himself part of the academic community.

Would you like to respond, Mr. Maltais?

Martin Maltais: Yes.

The quick answer is that this problem exists in every language other than English. For a number of years, we made broad efforts to try to have a common language, but we have noted over time that fundamental problems exist. I will name two of them.

The first is the issue of scientific production or the use of scientific research results. In most countries that use scientific research results, people generally don't speak English, but rather another language. This means that their ability to use, read and understand research results becomes a problem. We saw this during the pandemic in China. It's been clearly demonstrated.

English-speaking countries around the world get the most out of research results, while other countries, where other languages are spoken, get less out of them, as the ability to read research results and mobilize them is lower in countries where a language other than English is spoken. English-speaking countries basically charge for research work by other countries. That's a significant economic gain.

The other reality is the development of the next generation of scientists. When we can't get the most up-to-date scientific results available to young people in training in their mother tongue, we necessarily lose some of those young people, who will go down other paths. If it's 0.1% of a population, that's one thing. In Canada, where it's 23% of the population, it's another thing entirely. This is a major issue in terms of economic prosperity and GDP growth.

● (1145)

[English]

The Chair: I apologize for interrupting. Can you quickly wind it up?

[Translation]

Martin Maltais: Yes, I'm done.

[English]

The Chair: Okay. Thank you, Mr. Maltais.

We will now proceed to MP Blanchette-Joncas for two and a half minutes.

[Translation]

Maxime Blanchette-Joncas: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Mr. Maltais, in 2024, Acfas proposed that 25% of new investments in the three councils be reserved for research in French for at least 10 years, to address the gap.

Do you think this 25% rate is a floor or a maximum target to reach?

Martin Maltais: It's a floor, in our view. Until there is equality in the number of researchers and the next generation of researchers and until financial activities in scientific research in French are equivalent to those in English, a positive measure will be required.

The 25% rate is a floor. It will take a long time to reach the target of 25% per year. To make a major correction, should we make an effort quickly by setting the target at 30% or 32%, and then gradually reduce it? I am very sincere in saying that we should, but there's an issue of social acceptability. Some resistance will necessarily emerge among the country's universities.

Everyone is aware that action must be taken. How should it be taken, at what speed and at what pace? That conversation likely needs to happen at this table and in Parliament.

Maxime Blanchette-Joncas: Mr. Maltais, we see that the federal government is currently treating research in French as an official languages issue rather than as a normal component of federal science policy.

We are trying to determine who, in particular, should have greater responsibility for results. Should it be just the Department of Canadian Heritage? Should it be the granting agencies? Should it be all federal research funding agencies?

Martin Maltais: There should be clearer guidelines in statements and from the government itself on this issue and these matters. Guidelines should be provided very clearly, particularly within the potential umbrella organization, which we believe will eventually be created. That is how these targets can be known to everyone and be achievable.

Everyone, at every stage, should have their own level of responsibility, including in academia.

That's my simple answer to a very complex question.

Maxime Blanchette-Joncas: What do you think it would take now for us to meet in a few years and say that there is growth in the production and dissemination of knowledge in French?

Martin Maltais: We need to have targets above 25% for a number of years, then gradually return to 25% when we get closer to 23% in terms of equality.

Sophie Montreuil: The report's recommendations also need to be implemented.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you.

The time is up for MP Blanchette-Joncas. Now we will proceed to MP Ho for five minutes.

Please go ahead, MP Ho.

Vincent Ho (Richmond Hill South, CPC): Thank you, Madam Chair.

My first set of questions is for Acfas. Your organization publicly welcomed this report and called on the federal government to act on its recommendations. I want to ask the folks at your organization specifically about some of those recommendations.

The report recommends having “dedicated scholarships for French-speaking racialized students”, using race as a criteria for scholarships. It also asks to dedicate federal race-based funding and hiring targets, including race quotas, for racialized professors teaching in French. Does your organization support these two recommendations specifically?

• (1150)

[Translation]

Martin Maltais: Absolutely, we support them.

I'll let you comment, Ms. Montreuil.

[English]

Sophie Montreuil: I don't remember reading that. Could you tell me which page of the report? I don't remember reading recommendations towards racialized professors or students. I don't think there are, actually.

Martin Maltais: It's for French-speaking....

Sophie Montreuil: French-speaking, yes, but....

Vincent Ho: It says pretty specifically race-based scholarships, “racialized French-speaking”—

Sophie Montreuil: Can you tell us the page?

Vincent Ho: It doesn't have a page number. It's a web document.

Sophie Montreuil: If you find us the quotes, maybe we can comment on them afterwards. I've read through the 126 pages of the report, and I don't recall anything close to that. In terms of French-language speakers—students and professors—yes, that's the whole point of the study of the committee.

[Translation]

Martin Maltais: I want to say very quickly that, regardless of racial origin or targeted measures, as soon as there is a positive measure that favours French speakers—both researchers and the next generation of scientists—we agree with that recommendation. That's clear.

In fact, as part of the last \$1.7-billion measure, an opportunity was missed to take immediate action on the issue of science in French in this country. What we want is for the next measures that will be put in place or any other initiative to include clear targets, particularly in the recruitment of international students from different backgrounds, but who speak French, and for there to be a benefit or a positive measure for these people.

[English]

Vincent Ho: The subject of this study is the dissemination of scientific information and knowledge in French. To answer your question, the word “race”, at least in the English portion of the report, is mentioned 22 times across the report. Can you describe what the scientific connection is between somebody's race and their ability to create scientific knowledge in French?

Sophie Montreuil: I cannot answer that question. I'm really—

Martin Maltais: Me neither.

Sophie Montreuil: I'm sorry. We can answer later on. I'm really—

Vincent Ho: Did you say that you are answering the question or that you can provide your thoughts on that? You said you read the report through and through.

Sophie Montreuil: Yes, I did, but I don't recall reading anything that's in the sense that you're interpreting it. Maybe my interpretation is wrong. I could go back and read this, but I don't think I would make the same interpretation you did. I don't know which one is good, honestly. Yours is probably as good as mine, but we didn't make the same interpretation, I believe.

Vincent Ho: Does the gentleman have a response to that too?

[Translation]

Martin Maltais: If you're asking me whether people from different communities around the world or from different backgrounds have a special relationship with science in French or the language used, I would say that's not a question I ask myself. I think that all people around the world, regardless of their background, can have a meaningful scientific production.

However, to maintain the cultural and economic fabric, as well as the Canadian nation and identity, we need favourable measures to welcome more people who speak French in all aspects of international recruitment. These people must be able to work and pursue their scientific careers in French in Canada.

[English]

Vincent Ho: You just contradicted yourself in one sentence.

Thank you so much. I think my time is up.

The Chair: Thank you.

We will now end this panel with MP Rana for five minutes.

MP Rana, please go ahead.

Aslam Rana (Hamilton Centre, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Welcome back, everyone, for the fall session.

My question is for Mr. Larsen.

Your association has called on the government to move quickly on the external advisory panel's recommendations, given the financial challenges facing university presses. What are those challenges? How do they affect the French-language and bilingual presses?

David Larsen: The members of our association, the French-language presses and the English-language presses, all receive funding from various organizations. Those include the Canada book fund from the Department of Canadian Heritage, which provides money based on revenue generated by our book sales. We receive important funding from the Canada Council for the Arts, as well, for the work we do.

What we're asking for specifically is in terms of the direct support for scholarly publishing that we receive through ASPP, the awards to scholarly publications program through the Federation for the Humanities and Social Sciences. That amount of money hasn't been increased in over 20 years and is worth much less than it was in the past. Costs associated with publishing have increased significantly in that period, particularly through the 2020s and COVID, and after that especially. There are significant challenges that could be ameliorated with more funding.

I think that also what's asked for—and very importantly—is increased funding for the translation of work into English from French, and into French from English as well, so that we have a greater dialogue across the presses and across our knowledge and understanding in both languages, and are able to share with each other.

• (1155)

Aslam Rana: On the report's recommendations on scholarly publishing, which would have the greatest impact on your members and which should the government implement first?

David Larsen: Thank you.

That's an excellent question. Well, it's a tough one, actually. I would think that supporting the ASPP with the awards to scholarly publications would be a significant benefit.

The other thing that would do is support the mandate of scholarly publishing in Canada to publish the best scholarship. As you know, all of the books we publish are peer-reviewed. They then go through editorial review—editorial board review—at our press and other presses. Then, at that point, they would be going to ASPP and would be reviewed again. The level of scholarship that this program enables the production of is exemplary.

Aslam Rana: Thank you very much.

The report proposes a national translation program for scholarly books, with up to 20 grants a year, compared with the five translation grants available today. What difference would that make for your members and for the visibility of research in French?

David Larsen: It would have a significant impact. We'd be quadrupling the number. Five is a very low number. When you consider the number of books that are being published by Canadian scholarly presses each year—hundreds in both the French language and the English language—even 20 seems like a very small amount. There are other matters as well, such as international translation programs for us to reach readers abroad, but there isn't funding for that, which used to exist in the scholarly press as well. Certainly, increasing that amount to 20 would have significant impact.

I think what would also benefit, though, aside from the funding, would be that right now those five awards are in an annual intake that doesn't always align with the publishing schedules. It can mean the arresting or halting of decisions about publication or translation for some time. If there were more intakes throughout the year, scholarship would be assisted as well.

Aslam Rana: Thank you.

The basic grant under the awards to the scholarly publications program has stayed at \$8,000 since 2006. The report recommends raising that to \$12,000 and reserving two grants a year for French-language and bilingual presses in minority settings. How would these changes help process publishing in French?

David Larsen: That would have a really direct impact, especially for those in minority settings. We have a French-language scholarly press in Manitoba, the Presses universitaires de Saint-Boniface, which does excellent work but is also significantly underfunded. They're ineligible currently for Canada Council funding and the Department of Canadian Heritage or ASPP. What this would do is enable them to build up their publication program in a meaningful way. Also, there are other minority—

The Chair: I apologize for interrupting. If you could, please quickly wind it up. The time is up.

David Larsen: It would be good.

The Chair: With that, this panel comes to an end.

On behalf of all members of this committee, I want to thank all of the witnesses for appearing and providing their important input.

We will suspend the meeting for a few minutes so that these witnesses can leave and the witnesses for the second panel can take their seats.

The meeting is suspended.

• (1200) _____ (Pause) _____

• (1205)

The Chair: I call the meeting to order.

I would like to make a few comments for the benefit of the new witnesses.

Before speaking, please wait until I recognize you by name. For those participating by video conference, click on the microphone icon to activate your mic, and please mute yourself when you are not speaking. For those on Zoom, at the bottom of your screen you can make the selection for the appropriate channel for interpretation: floor, English or French. For those in the room, you can use the earpiece and select the desired channel. I would like to remind

witnesses that committee members may ask questions in either French or English. If you need interpretation, please take a moment now to prepare your earpiece and select the appropriate channel. I remind you that all comments should be addressed through the chair.

With that, I would like to welcome our witnesses for the second panel.

We are joined by the Association des collèges et universités de la francophonie canadienne's president and chief executive officer, Mr. Martin Normand. We are also joined by the Fédération des communautés francophones et acadienne du Canada's president Liane Roy and policy director Hector Vera. Our third witness group for today is from Université du Québec. We are joined by Réal Daigneault, acting vice-president for research, creation and planning, and Mr. Gagnon, senior consultant in strategic research development.

Welcome to all of the witnesses.

All of the witnesses will have five minutes for their opening remarks, and then we will proceed to the rounds of questioning.

We start with Mr. Normand.

Mr. Normand, you will have five minutes. Please go ahead.

• (1210)

[Translation]

Martin Normand (President and Chief Executive Officer, Association des collèges et universités de la francophonie canadienne): Thank you.

The Association des collèges et universités de la francophonie canadienne, or ACUFC, enthusiastically welcomed the report of the external advisory panel on the creation and dissemination of scientific information in French. We thank its members, the majority of whom came from our institutional network. Our concerns and proposals, as well as those of our members, have been heard very clearly.

The report paves the way for a federal strategy for the substantive equality of official languages in science, which would be based on, among other things, the ideas that research in French is a driver of economic prosperity and a strategic value for Canada. The advisory panel proposes three interlinked recommendations and important steps to address structural normative, financial and organizational challenges. These measures will enable federal institutions to deliberately fulfill their strengthened linguistic obligations under the Official Languages Act. The ACUFC broadly endorses the advisory panel's three recommendations.

I'd like to start with the recommendation on the federal government's leadership in compliance, accountability and data production.

Before this same committee, we have already recommended that the granting agencies adopt a real plan for implementing their obligations under the Official Languages Act. This report encourages us to expand that call to all institutions that have scientific and data production responsibilities. This goes well beyond the current partners in the action plan for official languages 2023-28, for whose renewal consultations have just begun.

We are thinking in particular of Global Affairs Canada, which, as we approach the Sommet de la Francophonie likely to be held in Canada in 2028, must do more to promote French in its diplomatic activities. Canada has a number of assets that enable it to play a decisive role in scientific diplomacy in the francophone space.

Therefore, we call for a true compliance and accountability framework for the production of scientific knowledge in French that will guide the government in its ongoing efforts to develop new positive measures to support research in French.

In addition, the recommendation calling for stronger governance of research in French through dedicated mechanisms could be transformative in the French-language research ecosystem. The Secretariat for the Coordination of Research in French could have a direct impact on government action. However, we would like to emphasize the mechanism for pan-Canadian coordination on post-secondary education in French proposed in the report. The ACUFC has been putting forward this recommendation since 2022. The mechanism would address a blind spot in existing structures and make it possible to ensure greater coherence and effectiveness among all interventions in the sector.

Finally, a new investment in research in French will help foster knowledge and talent and support the dissemination and promotion infrastructure that will contribute to the production and discoverability of scientific content. The need for French-language research and research on francophone minority communities is growing and becoming more complex. To that end, this new investment must include support for basic research, but also for applied research, which is booming in colleges across the country. It must support research that will enable Canada to exercise concrete leadership on mobilizing issues, to build the resilience of francophone communities, as well as that of Canadian society.

Nowhere is this currently more evident than in artificial intelligence. As initiatives under the “AI for All” strategy begin to roll out, it is essential to position the substantive equality of both official languages in its parameters and use it to market and promote knowledge produced in French. To establish common trust in the tools that are being developed, the research centres that are starting to emerge in our network and that work in French are true allies in ensuring that the benefits of the national strategy effectively reach the French-speaking public. This is certainly one of the francophone missions that could be supported, as suggested by the external advisory panel.

In closing, I would say that the report eloquently highlights the challenges and trends that our members have been bringing up for a long time to move the needle in terms of supporting and promoting research in French and research on francophone minority communities. Now, it is imperative to bring together all relevant stakeholders

in order to quickly turn the recommendations into concrete actions with measurable effects.

That is why we recommend that the committee unequivocally support the three recommendations and call on federal institutions to work with key stakeholders to outline the next steps in implementing the measures proposed in the report.

• (1215)

Thank you.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you.

With that, we will now proceed to Madame Liane Roy, the president.

Please go ahead. You will have five minutes for your opening remarks.

[Translation]

Liane Roy (President, Fédération des communautés francophones et acadienne du Canada): Madam Chair, members of the committee, thank you for inviting the Fédération des communautés francophones et acadienne du Canada, or FCFA, to appear today. I'm joined by our policy director, Hector Vera. We are here to share our thoughts on the recommendations in the report of the external advisory panel on the creation and dissemination of scientific information in French.

As the president of an organization representing some three million French-speaking Canadians living in minority communities across the country, I fully subscribe to the following principle, which is at the heart of the report: Research in French is an issue of substantive equality.

In 2023, legislators modernized the Official Languages Act. Among other things, this modernization aims to achieve substantive equality between French and English. The act requires federal institutions, in particular, to take positive measures to support the development of official language minority communities.

It's time to put words into action.

The advisory panel's report clearly highlights the barriers to the creation and dissemination of scientific knowledge in French. Above all, it shows why research is essential not only to ensure the future of our communities, but also to ensure Canada's scientific capacity and economic prosperity.

In research, French can be perceived as a second-class language. However, it would be a mistake to conclude that there is a lack of will or expertise among French-language researchers. What is missing are the conditions and resources to produce and disseminate scientific knowledge and have it recognized.

Therefore, the three recommendations in the report seem essential to us: strengthen governance to ensure better coordination of actions; provide dedicated funding for researchers and institutions so that they have the means to achieve their ambitions; and aim for the Canadian government's leadership in the recognition of research in French in the Canadian scientific ecosystem.

The report also notes the need to produce and disseminate evidence. Without reliable and accessible data, it is impossible to measure gaps, identify needs, target positive measures and assess results. Without that ability, there can be no substantive equality as set out in the Official Languages Act.

In this specific context, the data must meet certain conditions. They must be disaggregated by language, detailed enough to reflect the reality of the various francophone communities, produced regularly and, above all, be public to allow for transparency and good accountability.

The report also highlights the importance of community-based research. In minority settings, colleges, community and associative organizations, the private sector, government agencies and other network players on the ground also produce knowledge that helps support the vitality of communities.

That is why we support the idea of monitoring French-language graduation and enrolment trends in French and of making the survey on the official language minority population permanent. That survey is essential. It supplements the census data and creates a much more accurate picture of minority communities. Conducting that exercise on a regular basis would make it possible to better understand the gaps, guide the positive measures taken by federal institutions and assess them.

We also recommend that the Government of Canada strengthen the implementation of the Official Languages Act by developing, in collaboration with francophone minority communities, additional tools and mechanisms that enable federal institutions subject to the act to collect, produce and analyze evidence on official languages needs, effects and outcomes.

In conclusion, we recommend that the committee support all of the measures and recommendations in the panel's report. Implementing these recommendations would give federal institutions the means to meet their obligations under the Official Languages Act and would concretely contribute to the advancement of substantive equality in research.

Thank you very much.

• (1220)

[English]

The Chair: Thank you.

With that, we will now proceed to Mr. Daigneault, acting vice-president for research, creation and planning.

Please go ahead. You will have five minutes for your opening remarks.

[Translation]

Réal Daigneault (Acting Vice-President for Research, Creation and Planning, Université du Québec): Thank you, Madam Chair.

I would like to thank the committee for this invitation and for the work it does to support research in Canada, particularly research in French.

I also want to acknowledge the quality of the work accomplished by the external advisory panel on the creation and dissemination of scientific information in French. The diversity and expertise of its members, as well as the rigour of its approach, give it a lot of weight.

The Université du Québec is one of the country's main research centres with 10 institutions, 100,000 students and a presence in nearly 40 municipalities across the province. One of the hallmarks of our research is its proximity to small and medium-sized businesses, municipalities, schools, health institutions and community organizations. Its research is high-level, rooted in the needs of society and conducted in a fully francophone environment.

This is a very real issue for us. It is easier for francophone businesses, municipalities, schools and health institutions to take ownership of the research when it is conducted, disseminated and centralized in French. Therefore, the language of science has an impact on the environments' ability to use this knowledge.

The advisory panel's report reveals some important findings.

First, research in French is not a peripheral identity issue; it is a matter of substantive equality, a vector of economic prosperity and a strategic value for Canada.

Second, the barriers are systemic. The question is no longer whether these barriers exist, but how to remove them.

Scientific recognition mainly follows paths where English is predominantly used, and these paths also influence the allocation of resources. These mechanisms produce a well-known cumulative and concentration effect known as the Matthew effect: the more resources an institution has, the more it can recruit talent, develop infrastructure and increase its visibility. This recognition then makes it easier to receive new funding, and the cycle continues.

This high concentration doesn't necessarily translate into a net gain for Canada. It mainly serves to strengthen the same clusters, while the diversity of fields and perspectives also contributes to the country's scientific wealth. In the Canadian context, this dynamic comes at the expense of francophone institutions and their ability to develop research rooted in the realities of more than 20% of the population.

The data reveals that this dynamic has been ongoing. In the early 2000s, francophone universities received about 20% of the federal funding allocated to Canadian universities. Today, it is less than 15%. It is a serious slide: in 25 years, their share has decreased by about a quarter and is now well below the demographic weight of francophones.

Obviously, this decline in funding is not a reflection of a scientific talent deficit. It reveals instead an issue with the circumstances that allow this talent to develop, be recognized and be funded.

Recent investments also show that this trend won't be automatically reversed. The Eddie Goldenberg research chairs of Canada program will provide approximately \$1 billion. In its first cohort, only eight of the 64 research chairs were awarded to francophone institutions. If the mechanisms remain unchanged, new investments will continue to strengthen primarily institutions that already have the best staff.

Therefore, we support several of the measures proposed by the advisory panel, including better federal coordination of research in French and increased support for partnership-based research. However, after a 25 year slide, we believe a foundational change in resource allocation is needed.

Consequently, the Université du Québec recommends that 25% of federal funding of academic research be reserved for francophone institutions. This target uses the demographic weight of francophones as a reference point, while incorporating a catch-up logic, as a number of people have talked about this morning. This target does not call into question scientific excellence or peer review. Its purpose is to ensure the means to develop it are provided in an equitable way.

• (1225)

Why only fund institutions rather than individuals or publications? Because that's where real research capacity in French is being built: researchers, support services, graduate and postgraduate programs, scientific life and partnerships with communities that work in French.

It's also a matter of equity for the next generation of francophones. Francophone students must attend institutions with strong research capacity to have the same opportunities to learn about research and pursue graduate studies.

Substantive equality is not just about—

[English]

The Chair: Can you quickly wrap up in the next 15 seconds?

[Translation]

Réal Daigneault: Okay.

In conclusion, we believe the federal government should adopt the proposed measure of reserving 25% of federal funding of academic research for francophone institutions.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you.

Thanks to all the witnesses for their opening remarks.

We will now begin our first round of questioning with MP Godin.

Please go ahead. You have six minutes.

[Translation]

Joël Godin: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you to the witnesses. We regularly meet some of them at the Standing Committee on Official Languages. It's a pleasure to see them here. They were probably surprised to see me here.

First, I have some questions for Mr. Normand, from the Association des collèges et universités de la francophonie canadienne.

Mr. Normand, I can hear your optimism and enthusiasm. This is a good report and the panel did a good job.

You also talked about artificial intelligence. While I think it's a hot potato we're avoiding, it's also a very important factor to take into consideration for the future of the French language.

How does this report give you the tools to ensure the French language is more widely disseminated, which would then feed the beast that is AI?

Can you shed some light on the report, on your enthusiasm and on AI?

Martin Normand: Absolutely.

As I said in my opening statement, AI could certainly be one of the francophone missions the new investment in research in French could support. There's no question. Francophone communities are currently thinking about these specific AI needs. At the same time, some of our network institutions are creating research centres that could receive equivalent support to meet those needs.

The report takes us a step further regarding the consideration that must be given to the substantive equality of official languages in all federal institutions that have scientific or data production responsibilities, and not just the granting councils.

After the publication of the "AI for All" strategy a few months ago, we quickly noticed that substantive equality seems to be the blind spot in that strategy, and this blind spot needs to be corrected very quickly. This strategy has already led to investments, but we don't always see how francophone communities will benefit fairly from new AI investments.

As far as the normative aspect of this report is concerned, we need to think about how to properly use the new funds set out in such a strategy to support research in French, increase its impact on communities and build confidence in AI tools in French.

• (1230)

Joël Godin: You understand that the more content you put into an AI tool, the more it automatically disseminates it. This means we have to feed the beast. How will your members contribute to that?

Martin Normand: Many of our members are developing AI research centres, whether for applied or basic research.

The efforts everyone is making to develop new tools and innovative solutions for businesses is one thing, but AI research investment must also allow these tools to explore existing information in French, and not just provide for equivalent performance in French, as the AI strategy does. I don't believe an equivalent performance in French compared to AI tools developed in English is substantive equality.

It is in this sense that the investments and strategies being deployed and based on the normative findings in this report must also lead us to an equivalent development of AI strategies in French.

Joël Godin: Should parameters be set to require equity and equality between French and English?

Martin Normand: Absolutely. The Official Languages Act calls for these principles. We agree on that.

Joël Godin: We agree.

Since we're talking about the Official Languages Act, I'll turn to Ms. Roy, from the FCFA. We had a chance to work together. I like it when you say that we need to put words into action. We're hearing here today that the report is positive and wonderful, but we want action.

From a socio-economic standpoint, how will the dissemination of the French factor and research in French help official language minority communities? Is there a positive impact? Is there interest? In the socio-political context, is this a good opportunity for us?

Liane Roy: Absolutely. I think the quick answer to your question is access to evidence. Data needs to be disclosed and communicated so research, in particular, can continue. You talked about the Official Languages Act. We need conclusive data to participate in the consultations that are now required by the new Official Languages Act. Evidence is also important, because that's where we can find elements of substantive equality in everything related to public policy. However, we have to develop these public policies based on the information we can gather.

That's not currently the case. There's a big gap in terms of access to evidence. We see it in our communities. It's very difficult to give advice or participate in consultations without that data.

Joël Godin: What I understand is that disseminating research in French is a tool for economic development in official language minority communities.

Liane Roy: Absolutely.

Joël Godin: In terms of the data, is it estimated or listed data?

Liane Roy: It's both.

Joël Godin: That was a nod to the work we did at the Standing Committee on Official Languages.

I'm going to turn to Mr. Daigneault, from the Université du Québec.

Mr. Daigneault, do you have anything to add quickly? You praise the report and recommend that we go further and implement the recommendations. Is there anything missing in this report?

Réal Daigneault: I couldn't answer that question, actually. Instead, I'll focus on something that I would say hasn't been considered so far, in terms of the language of institutions, which becomes a vector for really doing research, training—

[English]

The Chair: Time is up, so can you quickly wind up?

Thank you. We will come back in the second round.

We will now proceed to MP Eyolfson for six minutes.

Please go ahead.

Doug Eyolfson (Winnipeg West, Lib.): *Merçi* to all the guests who have come. My French is.... I'm learning, but I'm not yet at the level where I can competently use it in these meetings.

Mr. Gagnon, you were talking about the valuable contribution of the Université du Québec and the amount of research and the number of publications in the French language that are coming out of it. It sounds like this is a very good initiative and a very good resource for promoting the French language in science and research.

In general, when it comes to policy and education, of course, these are provincial matters. In this respect, Quebec is not the issue because Quebec is, of course, promoting science and research publications in French. How would you recommend that the federal government work with the other provinces to help ensure that their universities will also increase the amount of research and the number of publications that they produce in French?

• (1235)

Ghyslain Gagnon (Senior Consultant in Strategic Research Development, Université du Québec): Thank you very much for the question.

[Translation]

I would say that one of the very strategic initiatives, which we discussed in the first hour, is the Service d'aide à la recherche en français, which is currently supported by Acfas. This service helps researchers who do research in French outside Quebec write grant applications in French and offers to revise them. This is a very important measure.

Also, the evaluation criteria should continue to include the impact on society and communities.

Réal Daigneault: If I have time, of course, I would add that research in French is a process. It doesn't just involve publications or grant applications. It's a process that includes training the next generation, establishing relations with the communities, and passing on knowledge to the communities, the contributors and the sector in general. When it comes to publications, we are ultimately achieving one of the objectives whether those publications are in French or in English.

What's important is the entire process that organizes research, such as training students and understanding the issues and needs of the communities. Basically, it has to lead to research projects and research results that are usable and transferable and that the various sectors can understand.

Scientific publication is a vector. Of course, it's not the only one.

[English]

Doug Eyolfson: Thank you for that. I agree with you completely.

What I'm trying to get at is how we can best work with the provinces. As you know, we sometimes get push-back from the provinces if the federal government tries to encourage things under their jurisdiction. How can we help facilitate these things in provinces that would claim we're stepping on their jurisdictional toes?

How can we do in other provinces what you're doing in Quebec, depending on which provinces might not have the same interest at the provincial level in doing this? How do we work with them to further expand these initiatives throughout universities in Canada?

[Translation]

Ghyslain Gagnon: There is one area where the federal government has control, and that's in the way funding is allotted to the three granting agencies, in addition to the Canada Foundation for Innovation and the Canada Research Chairs. The main measure we recommend is that a 25% share of federal research funding be allotted to francophone universities, including those outside Quebec.

When francophone universities, including those outside Quebec, receive their fair share of federal funds for research, research in French at those universities will increase, and that momentum will lead to more projects and more research.

This is one of the direct and tangible ways in which we can improve the situation without encroaching on areas of provincial jurisdiction.

[English]

Doug Eyolfson: Thank you.

Go ahead, Monsieur Normand.

[Translation]

Martin Normand: The report proposes a measure to move in that direction: a pan-Canadian consultation mechanism on post-secondary education in French where all issues related to the post-secondary sector could be addressed, including the issue of research in French.

For several years now, we've been calling for greater consistency between the levels of government and more effective actions on their part to increase the capacity to act and access to post-secondary education in French. Through such a mechanism, we could be asking the tough questions you are asking, with all the right players around the table.

We could also build on examples from Quebec, such as the Fonds de recherche du Québec, which plays a very important role in Quebec's research ecosystem. There's no equivalent out there to what Quebec is currently able to do.

• (1240)

[English]

Doug Eyolfson: Thank you.

I believe that's my time.

The Chair: We will now proceed to MP Blanchette-Joncas for six minutes.

Please go ahead.

[Translation]

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

My first questions are for the Université du Québec representatives.

I'm sorry. I'm getting feedback in my earpiece. I don't know if it's just me or if my colleagues are having the same problem.

[English]

The Chair: We will restart the timer. Please go ahead.

[Translation]

Maxime Blanchette-Joncas: Thank you, Madam Chair.

My first question is for the Université du Québec representatives.

The report of the external advisory panel on the creation and dissemination of scientific information in French, which we are discussing today, clearly states the following: “Sustaining French as a language of research in Canada will require pan-Canadian investments in training a next generation of researchers in French.” However, according to the data you are presenting, the share of federal university research funding going to francophone institutions has dropped from nearly 20% in the early 2000s to less than 15% today.

How do you explain such a significant decline, Mr. Gagnon?

Ghyslain Gagnon: The collective psyche holds that good research requires the best minds. If we have the best minds, we'll have the best ideas. This will drive scientific progress. That's what matters most. In 2026, yes, we need excellent minds. However, to carry out good research, we also need teams—particularly support teams—and strong research infrastructure. Take the best mind in Canada—if such a thing exists—and place that person in an environment with less support staff. That person won't achieve the same levels of excellence as they would in a better-funded environment.

It's so important that it takes only a few external forces to foster certain environments. This then creates a tsunami effect, where additional funding attracts even more funding. Once the trend is set in motion, how do we stop a tsunami?

We also think that, since we use the same assessment criteria for everyone, we'll certainly promote excellence. I'm a researcher myself. My research is funded by the Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada and the Canadian Foundation for Innovation. I've served on many grant review committees. When we receive 50 grant applications and we're told that only two can receive funding, the difference between first, second and third place comes down to decimal points. As a result of this funding imbalance affecting French-language institutions and given the tsunami effect, the chances of receiving funding in the future become even slimmer.

Ultimately, if all this were beneficial for Canada as a whole, we would just move on to something else. It wouldn't be such a big deal. The issue lies in the fact that reduced funding for French-language institutions means that a significant portion of the population lacks access to research funding. Talented individuals lack the same opportunities to develop their potential. Even the next generation lacks the same opportunities to gain access to well-funded institutions and environments.

• (1245)

Maxime Blanchette-Joncas: Mr. Gagnon, let me take this opportunity to talk about tsunamis. Another piece of data is just as striking as a tsunami. The Université du Québec accounts for about 7.1% of Canada's university faculty, but receives only 3.5% of federal research funding.

I'm trying to understand. I wouldn't call it a trick question, but it's a highly complex issue. How do you explain such a significant discrepancy?

Ghyslain Gagnon: It's a useful comparison, because we're basically talking about the same network. The report does indeed refer to the same issues. There are systemic barriers. There are also addi-

tional challenges involved in carrying out research in French. Furthermore, there has been a funding imbalance for 25 years.

Is the 3.5%, compared to the 7%, the cause or the effect? I see it more like this. Since we don't have funding commensurate with the number of researchers that we have, this explains why we have a harder time securing funding.

In contrast, when it comes to provincial funding agencies, our faculty members secure their share of the funding. While other universities in Quebec—such as McGill University, the Université de Montréal and Université Laval—compete for the same grants, we still manage to secure our share.

Maxime Blanchette-Joncas: I'm trying to understand.

I might add that Quebec's university system is the largest university system in Canada. You said that, in Quebec, based on the distribution of funding, you receive more than you do under the federal system. In Quebec, you account for 28% of the faculty, but you receive 25% of the research funding. This funding is allocated in particular on the basis of merit.

Based on simple math, if research funding were managed entirely by the Fonds de recherche du Québec, you would perform better as a system in terms of funding allocation.

Ghyslain Gagnon: Yes, absolutely. Yet the assessment criteria are the same in Quebec. The Fonds de recherche du Québec's research grant and funding programs are also based on excellence, the quality of the applications and the potential impact of the research. For competitions in Quebec, the Université du Québec is given its fair share of professional weight. However, in Canada, this isn't the case. As I said, in Quebec, we participate in the same competitive funding rounds as universities in the U15 group, such as the Université Laval, the Université de Montréal and McGill University. We're successful in securing our funding.

It would be worthwhile to take a closer look at the differences between the funding mechanisms. In any case, this shows that the Université du Québec does indeed demonstrate excellence, but that some factors—as described in the report—limit its access to federal funding.

Maxime Blanchette-Joncas: Thank you.

Réal Daigneault: I would like to add something, if I may.

[English]

The Chair: You have 10 to 15 seconds.

[Translation]

Réal Daigneault: I would simply add that the phenomenon observed, but not fully understood—namely, the decline in federal funding from nearly 20% to 15%—involves multiple factors. In any case, we're affected by this decline, along with all the institutions, for that matter. Today, we're speaking on behalf of French-language institutions. Of course, the Université du Québec is one of them. However, all institutions are facing a decrease in federal funding.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you.

We will now start our second round. We will have three minutes for the Conservatives, three minutes for the Liberals and one and a half minutes for the Bloc. Then we will end this panel. We have to pass our budget for this study before we adjourn the meeting.

We will now proceed to MP Cody.

Welcome to the committee for the first time. You have three minutes. Please go ahead.

Connie Cody (Cambridge, CPC): Thank you.

Thank you to everyone for coming today. We'll have to be quick to get these questions through.

My first question is for Mr. Gagnon.

In committee, when we discuss reports, we spend much of our time discussing the specific verbiage used, as a word can have a technically correct literal translation while carrying a very different meaning depending on its scientific, cultural or linguistic context. Are current AI translation systems capable of performing sufficiently good translations? How much human intervention is still essential, and where is it needed?

• (1250)

Ghyslain Gagnon: Do you mean the use of AI translation for grant proposals or for reports? I'm not sure I understood the question.

Connie Cody: For the translation of the research from French to English, how capable are current AI translation systems of doing the translations?

Ghyslain Gagnon: They're better than yesterday's, but they'll be less good than tomorrow's. They're getting increasingly good at translating research abstracts and research documents, and I believe more and more we will be able to rely on those. Today, for very specific research topics, we still need human intervention to make sure that the translation is done correctly.

Connie Cody: Thank you.

My next question is for Monsieur Daigneault.

There are different approaches to scientific terminology between Canadian and European French, including a greater acceptance of English-derived terms in France versus stronger efforts in Canada to develop French terminology that resists English influence. How do researchers consider these differences when there is no one form of French as a universal academic standard, particularly when terminology used in Canadian scientific institutions may differ from terminology used in France?

[Translation]

Réal Daigneault: This is a difficult question regarding terminology. Of course, I would say that, when it comes to French terminology, Canada and Quebec tend to be more rigorous than France, for example. France allows for more deviations and buzzwords.

Now, how does this affect scientific output and quality? Ultimately, we consider it an obligation and a duty to use correct French language and terminology to preserve the language, educate students and write articles. We believe that this is the best way forward.

That said, some dichotomies and differences with other countries arise in the use of terminology. I would say that we must remain consistent with our values and stick to terminology that respects the French language.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you.

MP Cody, your time is up.

We will now proceed to MP McKelvie for three minutes.

Please go ahead, MP McKelvie.

[Translation]

Jennifer McKelvie (Ajax, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Chair.

My question is for Mr. Normand.

One of the report's recommendations concerns science diplomacy as a way to strengthen Canada's engagement within the international French-speaking community. I think that the French embassy is doing a remarkable job in this area.

Can you give us some concrete examples of how this recommendation could be implemented in Canada?

Martin Normand: Thank you for the question.

First, I think that Canada needs to recognize the leadership role that it can play abroad in cutting-edge French-language research. The current trend is to endorse a very anglonormative approach. This approach holds that research excellence is measured and disseminated in English. However, francophone researchers across the country are making significant contributions to the international scientific discourse and community, particularly within the francophone world. You need only visit the institutions of the Agence universitaire de la Francophonie to see how the French-speaking world is eager for knowledge in French in order to give itself the tools to address major issues.

We spoke about artificial intelligence. That's one example. There's also language learning. A significant increase in the number of French speakers is projected in Africa over the next 50 years. However, this growth will be sustained only if enough teachers can continue to pass on the French language. As a result, a great deal of research is focusing on the transmission of mother tongues and the French language within the francophone world. African countries need this research right now.

A significant portion of the research has focused on how to effectively provide services in French or in a minority language in jurisdictions with more than one official language. A wide variety of tools related to this topic have been shared around the world. The Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages of Canada in particular served as one of the channels to promote some of the tools developed in Canada.

The idea of funding science diplomacy programs—just as Global Affairs Canada has taken part in cultural diplomacy and citizen diplomacy—would make it easier for us to engage with countries around the world and to share knowledge beyond Canada's borders.

• (1255)

Jennifer McKelvie: Thank you.

I also have a question for Mr. Daigneault.

Which recommendation in the report would have the greatest impact on the professors at your university?

Ghyslaine Gagnon: It would be the creation of a secretariat to ensure the French-language lens in the allocation of requested grants. This organization would likely be the best place to obtain the details and to address all aspects of our proposed measure to set aside 25% of federal research funding for francophone institutions. Programs are currently designed without taking French-language research into account. This organization could play a positive role in this area.

[English]

The Chair: The time is up.

We will now end this panel with MP Blanchette-Joncas for 90 seconds.

[Translation]

Maxime Blanchette-Joncas: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I'm still speaking to the representatives of Quebec's university system.

You pointed out that only eight of the first 64 Eddie Goldenberg chairs were awarded to French-language institutions. What do you think that this says about the distribution of new federal research investments?

Réal Daigneault: It's a replication of our current system, with its concentration of research and the Matthew effect. It's a good example that will actually exacerbate the issue. Significant investments will be concentrated in universities that already have the infrastructure and support. This won't be to Canada's detriment. It's good for Canada. However, smaller universities—and particularly francophone universities, such as the Université du Québec—have less

capacity to create the environment needed to accommodate chairs of this nature.

We need to understand the phenomenon that will result from this concentration. The researchers now working in the ecosystem in Canada will also seek funding from the same research grants that other researchers turn to. This will further exacerbate the concentration. So, in a sense, these allocations pose a problem. They will simply reinforce our current system and its imperfections.

Maxime Blanchette-Joncas: Mr. Normand, is it possible to genuinely strive for substantive equality when no Eddie Goldenberg chairs are being awarded—

[English]

The Chair: I'm sorry for interrupting, MP Blanchette-Joncas. The time is up.

[Translation]

Maxime Blanchette-Joncas: Madam Chair, don't I have two and a half minutes for the second round?

[English]

The Chair: It's 90 seconds. It was three minutes for the Conservatives and the Liberals, and one and a half minutes for you.

[Translation]

Maxime Blanchette-Joncas: Is it possible to extend the committee meeting so that all members can have their speaking time?

[English]

The Chair: That would mean requesting additional time, and if we request now, I don't think we will be able to get it. I don't know how long it will take. We can look into it, but we have to pass the budget.

We are almost at 12:58. For another minute, you can go ahead.

[Translation]

Maxime Blanchette-Joncas: Okay, then I'll continue. I would like to sincerely thank my colleagues for their co-operation and support.

Mr. Normand, is it possible to genuinely strive for substantive equality when no new Eddie Goldenberg chairs are being awarded to French-language universities outside Quebec?

Martin Normand: Clearly, this funding allocation process presents a hurdle to substantive equality. Yes, eight chairs were awarded to francophone researchers, but none were awarded within our system of francophone institutions. The University of Ottawa obtained chairs, but I won't speculate on the working language of each of these chairs. However, none of the other institutions in our system obtained an Eddie Goldenberg chair held by a francophone researcher.

This further illustrates the growing gap between small French-language institutions in rural and remote areas, which are seeking to develop research capacity, and the larger institutions. As the Université du Québec explained, these larger institutions tend to accumulate more and more resources and strengthen their own capacities.

Maxime Blanchette-Joncas: Do you have the capacity to accommodate this type of chair?

Martin Normand: We're fully capable of accommodating these types of chairs in our system of institutions. Our system strives for excellence and is developing research infrastructure to the best of its ability.

• (1300)

Maxime Blanchette-Joncas: Thank you.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you.

With that, the round of questions comes to an end.

I would like to seek members' approval to adopt a budget for the current study. The draft budget has been sent to all the committee members by the clerk. It is in the amount of \$15,300. The breakdown is \$13,800 for witness expenses and \$1,500 for meal expenses. Is it the will of the committee to adopt the budget?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: The budget is adopted.

I have one quick thing before we adjourn our meeting. We had scheduled a briefing session with the chief statistician of Canada for Tuesday, October 27. I want to let all members know that the position of chief statistician of Canada has been vacant since the appointment of Mr. Loranger as the national statistician for the United Kingdom.

The committee can decide to have another representative from Statistics Canada appear on October 27 or wait for an interim chief statistician to be appointed, which is unlikely to occur before October 27. What is the will of the committee members? Should we go ahead with October 27 with a representative?

Go ahead, MP Baldinelli.

Tony Baldinelli: The request and the motion came from a specific colleague of mine who is not with us this afternoon. Could I take that back to him and get his comments? On Thursday, I'll provide you with a response.

The Chair: Okay.

Could all the members discuss this within their caucuses and let either me or the clerk know? We will go by the will of the committee members.

MP Blanchette-Joncas, go ahead.

[*Translation*]

Maxime Blanchette-Joncas: Thank you, Madam Chair.

I would suggest, if possible, that we hold subcommittee meetings when we have planning to do. I understand that this may not be the usual practice here. However, I think that it could be helpful—rather than cutting speaking time—especially when we have witnesses. I think that it would be much more productive overall.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you. We will look into that.

Also, just to let everyone know, we will continue with the current study for the next three meetings, which are on September 24, this coming Thursday, and then on October 6 and October 8.

With that, I thank all the witnesses for appearing before the committee and providing important information.

Is it the will of the committee to adjourn the meeting?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: The meeting is adjourned.

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