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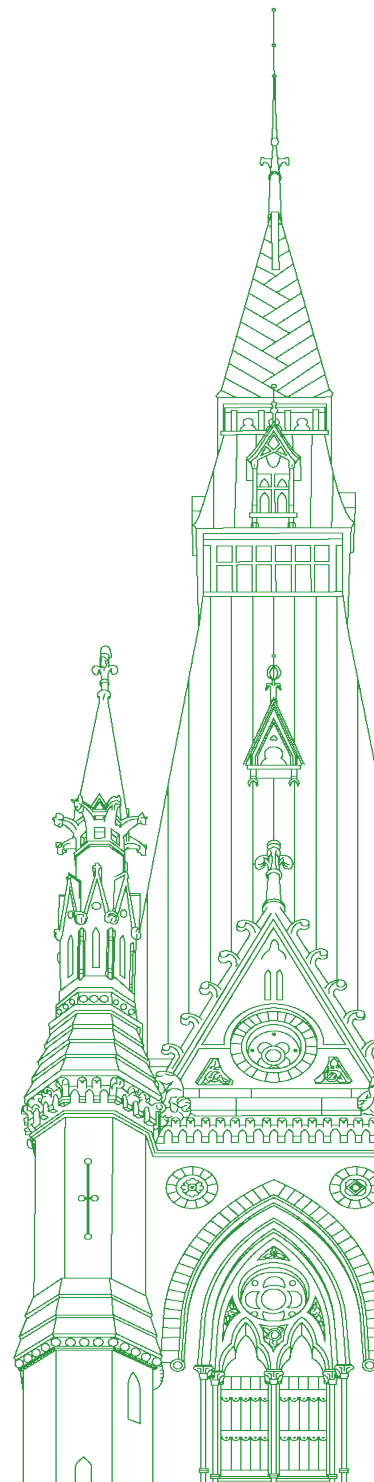
Standing Committee on Science and Research

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Chair: Salma Zahid



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• (1100)

[English]

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

Welcome to meeting number 45 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Science and Research. We are meeting today to resume our study on the report of the external advisory panel on the creation and dissemination of scientific information in French.

I would like to make a few comments for the benefit of witnesses and members. 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. Please mute yourself when you are not speaking. For those on Zoom, at the bottom of your screen you can make a 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 to prepare your earpiece and select the appropriate channel.

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. We appreciate your patience and understanding in this regard.

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

We are joined by La Cité Collégiale, represented by Lynn Casimiro, president and chief executive officer.

We are also joined by Université de Moncton, represented by Francis LeBlanc, associate vice-president of research and dean.

Our third witness today is the Université de Montréal, represented here by Francis Gingras, deputy vice-rector of research.

Welcome to all of you. You will each have five minutes for your opening remarks. After that, we will have a round of questioning.

We will start with Ms. Casimiro, president and chief executive officer.

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

[Translation]

Lynn Casimiro (President and Chief Executive Officer, La Cité): As president and CEO of La Cité, I want to thank you for this opportunity, Madam Chair, vice-chairs and members of the committee. It's a privilege to speak to you today about something as fundamental to Canada's future as the creation, mobilization and dissemination of scientific knowledge in French.

I would like to recognize the incredible work of the group responsible for the report we are discussing today, the external advisory panel on the creation and dissemination of scientific information in French.

The report paints a clear picture of the challenges we face while providing a bold vision for strengthening the place of French in the Canadian science ecosystem. As we do the heavy lifting to build Canada strong, it is vital that we give the creation and dissemination of scientific information in French its proper place. With Canada's recent openness to the European Union, we have a perfect opportunity to promote Canada's know-how, francophone community, official bilingualism and rich cultural diversity. As our post-secondary institutions actively work to attract international talent, it is paramount that we build the conditions and environment necessary to nurture francophone talent here in Canada and abroad.

La Cité engages mainly in applied research in partnership with a variety of organizations, but mainly with private business. La Cité has become somewhat of a research and development hub for small and medium-sized businesses, since the college allows them to retain intellectual property rights. As a result, businesses have access to expertise that would otherwise be out of reach, helping them to bring solutions to market quicker and to contribute to Canada's economic development.

Take Plantaform for instance, the portable, smart indoor garden customers are loving. Because it supports the growth of fresh food and helps to meet that demand in arid areas, the technology could even be valuable to the Canadian Armed Forces. Our applied research program helped this business refine its technology and solve engineering problems that were preventing commercialization.

InnovaCité, our hub for applied research and innovation, partners with universities and research institutes. It's where researchers, students and industry experts come together for a common objective: transforming ideas into real solutions that benefit businesses, communities and Canada's economic development. The scope of InnovaCité's achievements is a testament to its impact. It has contributed to more than 430 projects, supported more than 450 student contracts, provided more than \$10 million in state-of-the-art facilities and equipment, and supplied more than 17,000 square feet of lab and innovation space. InnovaCité also oversees BIOLab and GÉNIElab, two members of the pan-Canadian network of technology access centres, which helps to promote scientific expertise in French all over the country.

La Cité sent the advisory panel a submission in July 2025. The report recommendations come in various forms. In particular, we note the measures regarding dedicated funding for French research, the evaluation of French project applications informed by the minority context, and the promotion of college-based applied research in French.

We wholeheartedly agree with what Linda Cardinal told the committee when she appeared in September. She stressed the importance of accepting the advisory panel's recommendations in full and establishing a road map for implementation, including a clear timeline and next steps.

Education, research and innovation are at the heart of Canada's prosperity. If we want to build a strong and competitive country open to the world, we must ensure our ability to create, disseminate and promote scientific knowledge in French throughout the country. Investing in French research is investing in our collective ability to innovate. It is also making sure that francophones in every region of Canada have the opportunity to participate fully in our social, cultural and economic development.

• (1105)

It is time to make research in French a real strategic choice for the sake of Canada's future and the long-term vitality of Canada's francophone community.

Thank you.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you.

We will now proceed to Mr. LeBlanc.

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

[Translation]

Dr. Francis LeBlanc (Associate Vice-President of Research and Dean, Université de Moncton): Madam Chair and members of the committee, thank you for inviting me and for supporting research in French.

I represent Université de Moncton, the largest French-language university outside Quebec. We have a student body of more than 5,700, and 700 of them are graduate students. Université de Moncton has grown quickly in the past few years, introducing a number of Ph.D. programs and expanding our research activities in AI,

health and many other areas. We also do a lot of work with small and medium-sized businesses in the region, making us a real economic engine for the local economy.

Research in French takes many forms. First, there is the language of work, which, depending on the community, can vary tremendously from one institution to another. Second, there's the language used to write funding applications. Unfortunately, all too often, our researchers choose to prepare them in English, fearing that the committees of the main granting agencies and external reviewers won't assess their proposals properly. Third, there's the research on the francophone community in the broad sense, meaning health, humanities, social sciences and so forth. Fourth, there is the choice of which language to use for the publication of scientific research. For a host of reasons, too many francophone researchers still choose English. Despite the principles in the San Francisco declaration, which calls on stakeholders to assess research on its own merits, our researchers still favour English. Certain journals and publications are still perceived as being more prestigious.

First, I want to recognize the Government of Canada's recent efforts to strengthen research in French within the country. The support for the creation and dissemination of science in French and the French-language research support service of Acfas are two that come to mind.

However, we still have a long way to go. For example, the government developed the Canada impact+ research chairs program without consulting small and medium-sized universities. They were excluded from the competition. In the first round, 86% of the 64 chairs selected went to U15 members.

Our research programs in this country need to support research regardless of the postal code of the university where it's happening. We have research, researchers and talented students all over the country. If we don't distribute funding properly, a huge amount of untapped potential will fall through the cracks. Regional universities play a crucial role, especially in francophone minority communities, because some programs and projects would simply go unresearched.

Université de Moncton applauds the work of the advisory panel and largely supports its recommendations. We are strongly in favour of establishing a research in French support and promotion fund. The recommendation to create a graduate scholarships program to support students in francophone minority settings and French-speaking racialized students would be especially effective, in our view. We fully support the measure. It would help to counter the often harmful measures that affect smaller universities, particularly the allocation of scholarships based on funding wholly obtained by the universities previously. A comparison between Université de Moncton and one of the country's big universities revealed that, despite having 18 times the number of masters students, the larger university received 50 times the number of masters student scholarships.

• (1110)

As I see it, it's about fairness to the students, especially those attending French universities in minority settings.

We also see the establishment of a secretariat for the coordination of research in French as a good thing, and we support the measure. The secretariat could ensure that the processes—

[English]

The Chair: Would you please wind up.

[Translation]

Dr. Francis LeBlanc: —of the three funding agencies apply a francophone lens in their decision-making.

Thank you.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you.

With that, we will now proceed with Mr. Gingras for five minutes.

Please go ahead.

[Translation]

Francis Gingras (Deputy Vice-Rector of Research, Université de Montréal): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Ladies and gentlemen of the committee, Université de Montréal welcomes the report released by the external advisory panel on the creation and dissemination of scientific information in French. One of our professors, Vincent Larivière, co-chaired the panel, and the executive director of Presses de l'Université de Montréal, Patrick Poirier, was also on the panel.

Our university took part in the consultations leading up to the report, and we are delighted to see some of those recommendations in the report. They're as follows: the publication of data on the linguistic profiles of review-committee members and the success rates by language of scholarship and research grant applications; enhanced support for scholarly publishing and platforms that affect the dissemination and discoverability of French-language scholarly journals; and sustainable support for the Côte à Côte program to encourage student mobility within Canada's francophone community. These are all real measures that will help to strengthen the creation and dissemination of scientific research in French. What's more, they are grounded in mechanisms and structures that are already proven.

With that in mind, we support the recommendation to make a new investment of \$40 million annually for the production and dissemination of scientific knowledge in French. We do, however, want to point out that certain aspects of the recommendation need to be clarified.

On one hand, in order for the measure to have a significant impact, it clearly needs to be an additional investment—on top of what is already earmarked in the federal budget for research. It's worth noting that, as a share of GDP, Canada spends less than both the G7 and OECD averages. Even a \$40-million increase in funding for research in French won't close the R and D spending gap between Canada and its key international partners.

On the other hand, as is the case with measures that rely on strong infrastructure or well-established programs, one thing is essential. This new investment must build on the strength of research-

intensive francophone universities. They are the flagship of production and dissemination of science in French. Furthermore, this additional future investment in the development and promotion of science in French should cover the entire research cycle, from funding for new programs and the dissemination of research results right up to the transfer of knowledge to society as a whole to maximize the social and economic benefits.

Obviously, at the end of the day, research in French minority settings will only benefit from enhanced research funding for Quebec's top research universities, which already have research teams and infrastructure that help all of Canada's francophone community. That's the case with university presses like Université de Montréal's, which plays a major role in the dissemination of knowledge in French, for publications by both researchers in Canada and elsewhere.

In administering any fund specifically geared towards the dissemination of research in French, the government must make sure of something. Its goal to support small structures, and their emergence, in minority communities must not come at the expense of already underfunded actors working in the interests of the francophone community as a whole, both nationally and internationally.

From that standpoint, entrusting the governance of research activities to a secretariat for the coordination of research in French could be a good idea, especially if it becomes part of a future umbrella research-funding organization in Canada. In our view, however, the creation of a new body is less important than the core objective in this case: making sure that the place of research in French is an integral part of all federal decision-making in research and innovation. Whatever that coordination looks like, what matters is putting that mechanism in place quickly so that support for research in French is systematically considered any time new research initiatives are introduced, whether they originate with the three federal granting agencies or departments. The industry and defence departments are being called on to play an increasingly defining role in research and innovation.

In conclusion, Université de Montréal is already a leader in the production, dissemination and promotion of science in French. This is thanks to the research we produce, the platforms and networks we house, *Érudit* ou *Circé*, for instance, and our contribution to science diplomacy. Any federal strategy to support and promote research in French would benefit from drawing on the strength of Canada's largest francophone research university in terms of research volume. Université de Montréal is already a recognized leader in the development and transmission of French knowledge, through both its actions and its language policy. It will continue making its mark around the world to show emphatically that linguistic diversity and a high level of scientific production in French help, not hinder, Canada.

Thank you.

• (1115)

[English]

The Chair: Thank you.

We will begin our round of questioning.

For our first round of six minutes each, we will begin with MP Godin.

Please go ahead. You will have six minutes for your round of questioning.

[Translation]

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

Thank you to the witnesses for contributing to this exercise. I think we all realize the work that needs doing when it comes to scientific research in French.

Ms. Casimiro, you said the report was very clear. You contributed. You were involved. You're glad to see this report.

Now, I want to look beyond what's in the report, at the funding specifically for education in French. How can we more effectively and efficiently close the gap when it comes to research in French?

• (1120)

Lynn Casimiro: You mean beyond what's in the report. Is that right?

The report does contain some good recommendations in that regard. In my view, it has a lot to do with inter-institutional collaboration. I think we find collective strength in working together. The Université de Montréal representative just highlighted his experience in that area. La Cité has experience in applied research. Working together attracts more researchers and more students interested in the areas we're exploring. I think that builds a much stronger ecosystem, where it's possible to transmit and transform raw knowledge, if I can put it that way—basic knowledge—to support the commercialization of certain products. Together, we close the gap, attracting businesses and leading researchers. I think we can leverage the smallest and largest institutions that way. That's one of the approaches in the report, I believe. Collaboration is an area we can focus more on.

Joël Godin: Small universities are perhaps more important. I have a lot of rural communities in my riding. Those local connections exist, so small and medium-sized universities need to be involved in the process. With all due respect to small universities, how will this report foster collaboration with big universities such as Université de Montréal and Université de Moncton, and your institution?

Is La Cité considered a university, for that matter?

Lynn Casimiro: We are a college of about 10,600 students. We're a big francophone college.

Joël Godin: Here's my question.

How can this report, which you praised—and that is entirely appropriate—bring about greater collaboration in scientific research in French?

Lynn Casimiro: The report highlights the importance of having a central committee housed within the Department of Innovation, Science and Economic Development. This central hub would help bring together the various stakeholders in the Canadian francophonie so that they can work together.

I think every institution has a mentorship role to play with their counterparts, as well. So, if we continue to work in isolation, some institutions will evolve. If we work together, we'll be able to help one another—I'll put it that way—and lift up those who need it.

Joël Godin: What you're saying is that, according to the report, the secretariat will encourage collaboration.

I really liked the comment by Mr. Gingras, from the Université de Montréal, when he spoke of another structure. The money that is invested in structures isn't invested in research. So I'm not sure that creating another structure will encourage collaboration. The secretariat may encourage collaboration, but there won't be any energy or money left to encourage participants to collaborate.

I'd like to hear your comments on that.

Lynn Casimiro: Beyond the secretariat, there are, of course, the financial investments proposed in the report. They would also help build capacity at the various institutions. Once again, it is the criteria—or the manner in which the funds will be allocated—that will affect all institutions, regardless of their size. At that point, the secretariat would provide support for that kind of distribution. However, it is indeed necessary to ensure that the structure operates within the existing framework.

Joël Godin: Thank you, Ms. Casimiro.

Mr. Gingras, from the Université de Montréal, you mentioned that you are at the top of the list or among the leading universities in the field of scientific research in French. What is your position?

Can you also give us an overview of the various universities and provinces?

Francis Gingras: Yes. If we look at all Canadian universities, in terms of the volume of research activities, the Université de Montréal ranks second or third, following the—

Joël Godin: Which one is first and which one is second?

Francis Gingras: First is the University of Toronto, which is far ahead. The Université de Montréal and the University of British Columbia share second place.

Joël Godin: That's interesting. That's more or less the picture I wanted to get.

Why isn't the Université de Montréal, which is in a francophone pool—the common language of Quebec is, of course, French—at the top of the list? Is it a matter of resources or the pool?

• (1125)

Francis Gingras: There are obviously many factors, and the pool is certainly a factor. Indeed, it's a matter of resources, and those resources are also related to the pool.

Joël Godin: That brings me to another question, this time regarding resources.

You said that the \$40 million suggested in the report was obviously welcome. You will understand that adding more money is always the easiest path. At some point, effectiveness and efficiency also have to be improved.

So what—

[English]

The Chair: I'm sorry for interrupting. Your time is up. Maybe you can get into that in the second round. Thank you.

With that, we will go to MP Deschênes-Thériault for six minutes.

Please go ahead.

[Translation]

Guillaume Deschênes-Thériault (Madawaska—Restigouche, Lib.): Thank you.

Respected witnesses, you've provided three complementary perspectives. From what I understand, you support the recommendations outlined in the report. I would like you to tell us how these recommendations will strengthen the research communities at each of your respective institutions.

Ms. Casimiro, tell me about the perspective of a French-language college institution.

Lynn Casimiro: I'd like to come back to a point raised by my colleague from the Université de Montréal about the importance of being able to release evaluation reports on funding applications that are submitted. This is extremely important in order to fully understand the composition of the committees and the success rate of the various applications. As a college or a university, we face the same challenges when we submit applications in French. As a francophone college, we make it our duty to prepare all our documents and submissions in French. Therefore, I think it would be extremely important for one of the committee's recommendations to support this aspect.

Guillaume Deschênes-Thériault: Mr. LeBlanc, what is the perspective of a medium-sized francophone university outside Quebec?

Dr. Francis LeBlanc: Implementing the committee's recommendations will definitely make the francophonie work more closely together. Having more resources naturally leads to that. This ties in to the question your colleague asked earlier. It is natural for colleagues to focus primarily on collaborations within the Canadian francophonie, but also internationally. Therefore, we are requesting additional resources.

We also need to look at the resources and the distribution of current funds in Canada. Selection committees must be representative of the community, meaning that they must have members from different regions of the country and from universities of various sizes, whether large, small or medium.

Guillaume Deschênes-Thériault: Mr. Gingras, what about the perspective of U15 Canada on francophone institutions?

Francis Gingras: The idea is that it should be complementary. That has been said on a number of occasions.

However, to optimize the use of public funds, we must build on what already exists, on what has already proven effective, and develop it further. As for the major research universities that are part of U15 Canada, the existing research infrastructure can be used. The issue here is not simply a matter of having additional funding, but rather ensuring that these funds are directed toward a specific objective, which is to strengthen science in French. The goal isn't simply to add money to research funds—which is, incidentally, desirable for Canada—but to have a fund specifically dedicated to the production and dissemination of knowledge in French.

Guillaume Deschênes-Thériault: The advisory panel recommends the establishment of a pan-Canadian consultation mechanism on post-secondary education in French that would bring together, in particular, the Association des collèges et universités de la francophonie canadienne, federal partners, the Bureau de coopération interuniversitaire du Québec and the post-secondary education community, including both colleges and universities. Its mandate would be to boost the supply of French-language programs in minority settings.

Mr. LeBlanc and Ms. Casimiro, I'd like to hear your thoughts on the importance of this recommendation for your institutions.

Dr. Francis LeBlanc: In terms of the supply of programs, the Université de Moncton is certainly very open to collaboration. In fact, this already exists on our campus. For example, the Centre de formation médicale du Nouveau-Brunswick—New Brunswick medical training centre—which is affiliated with the Université de Sherbrooke's faculty of medicine, is located on the Université de Moncton campus.

Within our capabilities, we are of course open to collaborating on the creation and supply of programs with other institutions across the country.

Lynn Casimiro: I agree wholeheartedly with my colleague, and one key point is that this collaboration will give the funds being invested greater impact. If we continue to invest in both, with this element of collaboration among institutions, we can achieve much more together. We applaud this type of recommendation because it enables colleges and CEGEPs to collaborate with universities, research institutes and our pan-Canadian partners such as the ACUFC. It ensures that we are all working toward the same goal. In my opinion, the benefits will be much greater and the results will be better reported.

● (1130)

Guillaume Deschênes-Thériault: Thank you.

Mr. Gingras, as you mentioned, one of the courses of action to support emerging talent is to sustainably increase support for the Côte à Côte student mobility program. The Université de Montréal is already a key partner in this initiative. Can you explain further why you think this course of action is important?

Francis Gingras: This is a concrete example of what is already working, but it would benefit from being made permanent and having more secure funding. It's a program that facilitates student mobility within the Canadian francophonie. There is the Université de Montréal, Campus Saint-Jean in Alberta and the Cité universitaire francophone at the University of Regina. There are already partners at the Université de Moncton. We have partners, and we could expand the program—the project—and raise awareness of it. This enables students to move around within the Canadian francophonie, forge connections and strengthen the foundation of the ecosystem we are calling for, thanks to the future researchers in this ecosystem. Coordination is already starting to build through these exchanges facilitated by this program.

Guillaume Deschênes-Thériault: Mr. LeBlanc, regarding the issue of promoting student mobility within the Canadian francophonie, do you want to add anything?

Dr. Francis LeBlanc: Yes. I agree with my colleague from the Université de Montréal. Exchanges and the blending of ideas among institutions will lead to further collaborations. In other words, when we receive an intern from a university, the likelihood that we will collaborate with that university in the future increases. We are very active in recruiting interns, both here in Canada and internationally. Those interns contribute a lot to our research programs. Often, they will decide to stay or they will return to their country or to their institutions here in Canada, and the collaboration will continue.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you.

We will now proceed with 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 would like to welcome the witnesses who are joining us for this important study.

Mr. Gingras, you talked about the Circé Network. Can you explain to us exactly what that network does?

Francis Gingras: The Circé Network is the Quebec network for research and resource sharing among scientific journals. This is an initiative of the Fonds de recherche du Québec, which is allocating \$10 million to help Quebec scientific journals make a smoother transition to diamond open access—that is, open access at no cost to authors or readers. This truly facilitates the widespread dissemination of research. It's a requirement for journals in Quebec and across Canada. Quebec has decided to invest in facilitating the transition to diamond open access through this structure, which makes it possible to carry out pilot projects to, for example, pool editorial resources, explore how to better coordinate services for journals, as well as improve the transfer of knowledge to civil society, and the promotion and popularization of research findings.

Maxime Blanchette-Joncas: Okay. Thank you.

You mentioned \$10 million funded entirely by the Government of Quebec. Do you know why the federal government has not contributed to this initiative, which is so important?

Francis Gingras: This is an initiative of Quebec's chief scientist. The Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council, or SSHRC, which is the main organization that funds scientific journals in Canada, has expressed interest in this development. The issue of funding for scientific journals is actually at the heart of the report. The burden primarily borne by SSHRC for journals would undoubtedly benefit from being shared by the other councils—particularly the Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council and the Canadian Institutes of Health Research—if we want to develop research in fields other than the humanities and social sciences through French-language scientific journals. The funding of journals in Canada is primarily provided by SSHRC, but it would undoubtedly benefit from being more evenly distributed among the three councils.

Maxime Blanchette-Joncas: Okay. Thank you.

The report proposes, among other things, a new fund to support and promote research in French. You mentioned the Quebec government's initiative and the former chief scientist of Quebec, Mr. Quirion, who has now completed his term. I commend him. We're already talking about an existing structure, Circé and Érudit, whose executive director we had the pleasure of welcoming at our last meeting.

I'm trying to understand why we want to make new federal investments, in particular, when we already have existing structures. Would it be better to preserve and strengthen what we have in place instead of creating other parallel structures?

• (1135)

Francis Gingras: Of course, as I said in my opening remarks, the goal is what matters. So, by building on existing structures, such as Érudit, we serve the entire Canadian francophonie. Érudit already publishes journals from across Canada. The Circé Network is already working with journals from the Canadian francophonie. Therefore, I believe that additional support should build on structures that have already proven their worth and are already serving the entire Canadian francophonie.

Maxime Blanchette-Joncas: Thank you.

You also mentioned the diamond open access model. We're trying to explain it in layman's terms and summarize it for the people following our work. Circé's current role is to support Quebec journals, particularly in achieving this open access goal. You even talked about obligations. The Fonds de recherche du Québec has made this an obligation for 2028.

Do you currently have any estimates of the amount of funding required to ensure the viability of journals once they become fully open access and lose their subscription revenue?

Francis Gingras: We don't have precise figures to provide at this stage, since we are working on revising this economic model, but it is true that a significant portion of revenue comes from subscriptions. That portion will disappear with the move to diamond open access for funded journals, whether they are funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council or by the Fonds de recherche du Québec. So this is a shortfall that could be very significant for some journals.

The pooling of publishing services is one avenue that can be explored. However, there are also broader issues that the network is noting, such as the distribution of funds. The funds go to large commercial publishers, primarily in the United States. They are the ones receiving those funds. These are public funds that are ultimately used to generate enormous profits for a somewhat unbalanced publishing system.

Maxime Blanchette-Joncas: There's a lot of talk these days about sovereignty, particularly scientific sovereignty, territorial sovereignty and economic sovereignty. To achieve scientific sovereignty, we need our own journals.

In that case, you are aware that the government must provide more support for initiatives like Circé, and perhaps even provide compensation if necessary.

I'd like to hear your thoughts on the loss of revenue if we transition to open access.

Francis Gingras: That is fundamental. It is one of the demands the Circé Network made in its brief to the advisory panel, with the Université de Montréal's support. It's really about getting public support for scientific journals to ensure knowledge dissemination. The research is done using public funds and the results of this research must be returned to the public for free without private organizations profiting from it.

Maxime Blanchette-Joncas: Your message is well received.

I would like to address a fairly immediate subject for research in French. It is not always easy to conduct research in engineering and health. We know the main scientific journals are produced in English. Could the Circé Network establish a common and permanent infrastructure in Quebec, particularly to sustainably produce more scientific journals in these fields?

Francis Gingras: The Circé Network is working on it, but with all partners. Moreover, the Fonds de recherche du Québec has launched targeted initiatives to produce journals in French, especially in environment, technology and health. The Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council could start those kinds of initiatives. That's what we hope for. However, I would remind you that the Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada and the Canadian Institutes of Health Research could also play a role in disseminating knowledge in French. The three granting councils probably have a bigger role to play in that.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you.

We will begin our second round of questioning of five minutes and two and a half minutes.

MP Cody, please go ahead. You have five minutes.

Connie Cody (Cambridge, CPC): Thank you, Chair.

Through you, I'd like to thank the witnesses for coming today.

Dr. LeBlanc, you're a proud Acadian researcher and one of Canada's leading francophone scientists, and yet your internationally recognized astrophysics textbook was published in English. Was it your preference to publish in English rather than French, or was that necessary to reach a global audience?

Dr. Francis LeBlanc: It was mainly to reach a global audience.

[Translation]

I had considered publishing in French, but I definitely would have had to publish in France to reach an international audience. That said, there were already several manuals of this type in France. It is also more difficult for an outsider to get a publishing company in France to publish their work compared to local researchers they know. That's why I chose to publish my book in English, as a lot of researchers do, unfortunately.

● (1140)

[English]

Connie Cody: With that, if you had published your book in French, which French would you have translated it into? Which would you have published your research in, and would it likely have reached Harvard, Stanford, Cambridge and dozens of other universities to the same extent?

[Translation]

Dr. Francis LeBlanc: No. Obviously, you reach a much smaller audience when you publish in French. Ideally, we would have simultaneous translations, which may be possible now with AI. The market would have been much smaller if I had published a book in French. That's why scientists and health researchers often choose to publish in English; they have a bigger international impact. In a way, English has become the language of science at the international level.

[English]

Connie Cody: Thank you.

I'd like to direct my next question to Dr. Casimiro.

You mentioned the importance of intellectual property rights. With the increased usage of AI and research data being captured and stored in data centres in another country where the laws differ on protection and access, would you have concerns about retaining control and ownership of research from AI systems and intellectual property rights?

[Translation]

Lynn Casimiro: Intellectual property in colleges and CEGEPs is transferred to the companies that market their products. We don't publish the results of applied research; we use the journals to conduct applied research.

The question you're asking is more about the company that uses the product or service we developed with them. Research in French is important to us when we work with a company to develop the protocol it needs to solve an issue. At that point, we use scientific journals. If there was at least a French summary of journals published in English, we would be able to use that information to assess the gap and help businesses.

[English]

Connie Cody: How do you see the decision of the federal government to close seven research facilities, two of which I believe are in Quebec, impacting the scientific infrastructure and agricultural studies and future funding?

[Translation]

Lynn Casimiro: One of the challenges for colleges and CEGEPs is maintaining an infrastructure that makes it possible to welcome businesses. Currently, we work a lot in Quebec with college centres for the transfer of technology, or CCTTs. Elsewhere in the country, they are technology access centres. It's the same thing. It's just that Quebec started earlier, becoming the benchmark for the rest of the country.

At the moment, funding for these access centres is fixed. If we want to create a new access centre, we have to close one elsewhere. That is why there are no new access centres or CCTTs being developed. That is a problem, because when you create a new access centre, you lose all the innovation that was developed in the institution whose technology access centre has been closed, and that has repercussions. For the government, it's the same thing from a financial standpoint, but for innovation in the country, this dynamic leads to losses.

I believe we need to invest more in these technology access centres or college centres for the transfer of technology in Quebec.

[English]

Connie Cody: Thank you.

The Chair: Your time is up.

Now we will proceed to MP Noormohamed for five minutes.

Please go ahead.

[Translation]

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

From the point of view of a francophone institution outside Quebec, where should large institutions seek funding within the current funding system to address their realities?

Dr. Francis LeBlanc: The Université de Moncton and other institutions often turn to the following three organizations: the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council, the Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada, and the Canadian Institutes of Health Research. What we're asking for is a fairer distribution and assessment of our projects.

I gave the example of the Impact+ chairs. When it comes to these chairs, one predominant factor is the investment and the research capabilities of the institution that hosts them. In reality, a small institution doesn't have to invest as much as a large university to at-

tract a world-class researcher. We submitted an application for each of the competitions. We had good candidates, but we are still at a disadvantage when it comes to financial means.

• (1145)

Taleeb Noormohamed: That is duly noted.

If we could amend a rule for federal granting agencies to improve the competitiveness of francophone institutions outside Quebec, what rule would you choose?

Dr. Francis LeBlanc: I would choose the distribution of chairs, scholarships and a number of other things related to previous funding. Let's take the example of a large university like the University of Toronto. Since it is the number one university, if a hundred or so chairs are created, it will get a large number of them. Looking at the Canada 125 research chairs, we see they were awarded to a small number of universities. As for the Impact+du Canada research chairs, they have been awarded to major universities.

There's a side effect to that. It's a good thing that Canada can attract 100 world-class researchers. However, these researchers will have to compete for funds from the Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada, the Canadian Institutes of Health Research, and the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada. They're certainly going to get significant funding.

If the budget isn't increased based on the number of new researchers entering the system, it's the researchers with small but substantial amounts who will be excluded from the funding model. For every person we attract, there may be one, two, three, four or five researchers who will lose their long-term funding if investments aren't increased.

Taleeb Noormohamed: Okay.

Regarding research coordination, the advisory panel proposed a new structure: the creation of a secretariat for the coordination of research in French.

My question is for all the witnesses: what problems would this secretariat solve that could not be solved by clarifying the objectives, responsibilities or requirements of the existing granting councils?

Francis Gingras: Someone has to play the role of coordinator and watchdog. We have to make sure things get done. We were just talking about the Impact+du Canada research chairs and the Eddie Goldenberg chairs. For many reasons, these chairs have indeed mainly awarded to U15 member universities.

However, if we also take the language issue into account, we see that francophone universities are under-represented among the universities that were awarded these chairs. The Université de Montréal has received some, and we're very pleased to have also received some. That said, the proportion of chairs awarded to francophone universities is lower than the representation of francophones in Canada.

Regardless of its form or structure, the secretariat should ensure that when new research measures are taken, such as the creation of new chairs, they don't increase the deficit in the promotion and dissemination of research in French. That is more or less the role this secretariat could play. As I said, we believe the objective of coordination and verification is fundamental.

Lynn Casimiro: I would like to add to what my colleagues have already said. Some excellent points have been raised, and I wouldn't want to repeat them.

We must remember that the secretariat's role will be to ensure compliance with the distribution and use of funds, as well as coordination, while respecting the concept of substantive equality, which is part of the Official Languages Act. We also talked about fairness. This concept of substantive equality is really what we must support when it comes to research in French. In that context, the secretariat would serve as a watchdog, as Mr. Gingras pointed out.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you.

With that, time is up for MP Noormohamed.

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

Please go ahead.

[Translation]

Maxime Blanchette-Joncas: I'll turn to you, Mr. Gingras.

According to the report, university libraries spend about \$400 million a year on subscriptions and related services. As you said earlier, most of the money goes to foreign commercial publishers.

What would Quebec, particularly in its network of scientific journals, gain from maintaining this scientific dissemination capacity within Quebec trade infrastructure such as the Circé Network, or even Érudit?

• (1150)

Francis Gingras: That is essential, and it is also the spirit behind the transition to a diamond open access. There is a totally commendable will to ensure that research is disseminated as broadly as possible and that it is accessible to everyone. However, we must also ensure this research doesn't use public funds for a system that makes totally disproportionate profits. The players you are talking about are making huge profits with money from university libraries in Quebec and Canada. This is the reality for all university libraries. Moreover, there is a link with the language issue there.

I would also like to bring up the issue of the prestige the English language is given. It's also historically located. We're talking about a prestigious economy. It has not always been the case. Albert Einstein's major articles were published in German. At the time, they had the impact they could have, even if they were published in German. There are periods like that.

There is hope. Brazil, for example, has made major decisions to support science in Brazilian Portuguese. Moreover, it is the only national language for which we are currently seeing an increase in scientific journals. We see that the adoption of public policies in the area creates opportunities.

Maxime Blanchette-Joncas: Your message is heard loud and clear.

You spoke about under-representation, particularly in the allocation of new federal government investments. This historic investment of \$1.7 billion seeks to establish the Eddie Goldenberg Canada research chairs, or Canada Impact+ research chairs.

Based on your analysis, what message does this send to francophone universities?

You clearly showed that you can have just as significant an impact in research as anglophone universities.

Francis Gingras: Clearly, this presented an additional challenge. We had to integrate these researchers quickly into a francophone environment, while asking them to publish in French and possibly teach in French. So this is the reality facing our universities. We hope that an initiative of this nature—which we welcome and in which we participated—will be carried out in a way that takes into account Canada's linguistic reality and diversity. We consider this reality and diversity an asset for Canada, as I said.

My colleague spoke about the European Union and our desire to build closer ties with it. The linguistic diversity issue lies at the heart of Europe's research funding systems. Canada must leverage its expertise—specifically in this area—to build closer ties.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you. Time is up.

With that, we will now proceed with MP Ho. He's joining us through Zoom.

Mr. Ho, you will have four minutes, and then we will end the panel with MP Nathan for four minutes. Please go ahead.

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

My questions are for Professor Francis LeBlanc.

In your opening remarks, you mentioned that you are calling on the government to accept the report's recommendations.

The report in question specifically mentions the existence of pan-Canadian programs, such as the indigenous and Black engineering and technology Ph.D. project, in both the public and private sectors. It then notes that programs specifically targeting racialized French-speaking students are rare and that the training of the next generation based on race “is a matter of social justice.” The report then calls on French-language and bilingual colleges and universities to recognize the lived realities of students belonging to racialized groups. Finally, it makes a recommendation calling on the federal government to dedicate more funding and set hiring targets for racialized French-speaking professors.

I want to get your thoughts on whether you accept this recommendation.

[Translation]

Dr. Francis LeBlanc: We believe that the principle of fairness must be upheld when it comes to awarding scholarships. We know that certain groups have historically been under-represented in certain disciplines. So it's only natural to want to provide these groups with a greater number of scholarships to ensure true representation, especially in certain fields, such as the sciences or other disciplines. This is also true for the francophonie.

I gave you an example earlier comparing the Université de Moncton to a large university—and it wasn't the university of my colleague, Mr. Gingras—where there are 18 times as many students but 50 times as many scholarships. As a result, students will gravitate towards those universities because they'll have a better chance of obtaining a scholarship.

• (1155)

[English]

Vincent Ho: I understand. You spent a lot of time in the first hour talking about institutional size and the issues and challenges facing that, which leads to another point.

I want to get back to my original question. What exactly is Black and indigenous engineering? How is that different? I want to hear your thoughts on that.

[Translation]

Dr. Francis LeBlanc: Engineering isn't my field, but I think that the gist of the report is to ensure more accurate representation in various fields.

[English]

Vincent Ho: I know you're not an engineer, but you are a professor in the department of physics and astronomy at l'Université de Moncton. Are Newton's laws of motion different because of the race of the engineer, or are the laws of thermodynamics any different?

[Translation]

Dr. Francis LeBlanc: No, I agree. However, I'm working—

[English]

Vincent Ho: I'm glad you agree, yet you are calling on the federal government to adopt more Black and indigenous engineering programs. I just want to hear you connect the dots on this.

[Translation]

Dr. Francis LeBlanc: It's a matter of perspective. For example, I'm an astrophysicist and an astronomer. Astronomy has developed differently depending on the country of origin, whether we're talking about constellations or perceptions of the universe—

[English]

Vincent Ho: It doesn't develop based on the race of the physicist, right?

The Chair: I'm sorry for interrupting, MP Ho. Your time is up. Thank you.

Vincent Ho: I'd like to get that response to my question in writing, whenever possible. Thank you.

The Chair: Mr. LeBlanc, if you could provide the response in writing, that would be great.

We will end this panel with MP Nathan for four minutes.

Please go ahead.

Juanita Nathan (Pickering—Brooklin, Lib.): Thank you, Madam Chair.

Thank you, all of you, for being here.

The advisory panel report outlined structural fixes, but full implementation relies heavily on federal funding. Which specific post-secondary institutions or academic networks have already taken the initiative to proactively lay the groundwork or scale up their internal infrastructure to align with these recommendations?

All three of you can answer for your institutions, if you can.

[Translation]

Francis Gingras: I can talk about these key players that already exist and that are listed in the report. For example, the Érudit platform, which the Université de Montréal launched in partnership with the Université du Québec à Montréal and the Université Laval, has since expanded across Canada. Érudit plays a vital role in the dissemination of science in Canada, particularly science in French. This is a concrete example.

Another example is the Circé Network, which I had the opportunity to discuss at some length in response to questions from member of Parliament Maxime Blanchette-Joncas. This is another example of a Quebec government initiative that could easily be expanded to a Canada-wide objective if the necessary funding became available.

There's also the Côte à Côte program, which was brought up earlier. This program facilitates mobility throughout Canada. It's a Université de Montréal initiative for Quebec.

Lynn Casimiro: I can talk about an initiative led by one of the groups brought up in the report. This group is the Association des collèges et universités de la francophonie canadienne, which has already established a partnership. It used to work exclusively on behalf of the Canadian minority community, but it now has a partnership with the Université du Québec. It also recently merged with the Réseau des collèges et des cégeps de la francophonie canadienne. This is a concrete example of how we're joining forces to create a structure that can support the report's recommendations.

They're also listed as partners in this collaborative effort. This is an example of the groundwork already laid. We're talking about three years of work to develop this type of collaboration and to lay the foundation that will support these investments. We'll be optimistic. We'll say that these investments will be made. When these investments are made, there will already be structures in place, such as the examples given by my colleague and the one that I'm telling you about. These structures will go a long way toward promoting the dissemination of scientific knowledge in French.

• (1200)

Dr. Francis LeBlanc: My colleagues brought up *Érudit*. The Université de Moncton publishes through *Érudit*, which gives it greater visibility. Another example is Acfas, which has developed a support service for research in French. Universities were consulted, and we actively participated in setting up this support service. The service may vary depending on the type of institution. It can benefit francophones in anglophone universities or, of course, francophones in minority communities or other settings. Many initiatives have already been launched. I believe that more will follow.

[English]

Juanita Nathan: Thank you.

How much time do I have?

The Chair: You have 20 seconds.

Juanita Nathan: I'll use that to thank them.

The Chair: Okay, thanks a lot.

With that, I want to thank the witnesses on behalf of all the members for appearing before the committee and providing their important input for this study.

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

• (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.

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 are 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 a question in either French or English. If you need interpretation, please take a moment now to prepare your earpiece and select the listening channel you need in advance, so you can take full advantage of the time allotted for questions and answers.

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 today.

We are joined by the Canadian Association of University Teachers, represented by Yalla Sangaré, treasurer, who is joining by video conference.

Also represented today is the Department of Industry, which is being represented by Nipun Vats, assistant deputy minister, science and research sector.

Our third witness is the National Research Council of Canada, represented by Karen Cahill, vice-president, corporate services and chief financial officer. We are also joined by Julie Lefebvre, vice-president, emerging technologies.

All the witnesses will have five minutes for their opening remarks, and then we will get into the round of questioning.

We will begin with Mr. Sangaré, who is representing the Canadian Association of University Teachers.

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

• (1210)

[Translation]

Yalla Sangaré (Treasurer, Canadian Association of University Teachers): Madam Chair and distinguished members of the Standing Committee on Science and Research, I would first like to thank you for inviting me to speak to you.

I'm here on behalf of the Canadian Association of University Teachers, or CAUT. However, I'm also a professor at the Université Sainte-Anne, located in the heart of Nova Scotia's Acadian community. So I teach at a francophone university in a small minority community here in Nova Scotia.

At CAUT, we represent 75,000 members from 130 universities and colleges across the country. We promote and advocate for academic freedom. This truly lies at the heart of our mission. We also advocate for a publicly funded, high-quality and widely accessible higher education system. We view this type of system as a public good that plays a fundamental role in democracy.

Canada has an outstanding post-secondary education sector. Researchers, professors and students across the country contribute each day to the advancement of knowledge, the training of the next generation and the development of our communities. We must make it our priority to give them the best possible tools for success. This means giving francophones across the country the opportunity to study in French, carry out research in French, publish in French and train the next generation of researchers in French.

As a result, we at CAUT warmly welcomed the report entitled "Research in French and Substantive Equality: An Opportunity". Given the tight timelines, our message is crystal clear. We support the recommendations in this report. We're calling on the federal government to implement them quickly and ambitiously and to back this implementation with sustainable and, above all, predictable investments.

This report does indeed provide a key diagnosis. This diagnosis isn't new. Other reports have already pointed out the same issues. Most importantly, this report also provides practical solutions and a road map for moving forward.

French-language research faces persistent and systemic barriers here in Canada, as well as in other parts of the world. The proportion of French in international scientific publishing is declining. For example, the proportion of indexed scientific articles published in French fell from 2.14% in 1990 to 1.06% in 2023.

In a country where French is an official language, carrying out research in French shouldn't be the source of a disadvantage. The Official Languages Act recognizes the unique status of French in Canada and North America, as well as the responsibility of federal institutions to protect and promote the language. The Government of Canada is committed to protecting and supporting institutions in official language minority communities to ensure their vitality. Our science policy must also reflect this responsibility.

I'll stop here, because I can see that my time is almost up. However, broadly speaking, we support this report and want its recommendations implemented. We have a few minor concerns here and there, for example when it comes to artificial intelligence. That said, we ultimately recommend the implementation of this report.

Thank you again for inviting me.

• (1215)

[English]

The Chair: Thank you.

With that, we will proceed to Mr. Vats, who is representing the Department of Industry.

Please go ahead. You have five minutes.

Nipun Vats (Assistant Deputy Minister, Science and Research Sector, Department of Industry): Thank you very much, Madam Chair and members of the committee.

I am pleased to appear before the committee to discuss its study of the report of the external advisory panel on the creation and dissemination of scientific information in French.

[Translation]

Research in French is essential to Canada's research excellence. It broadens the range of knowledge, perspectives and talent that contribute to innovation and economic development while strengthening the vitality of francophone communities across Canada, including official language minority communities.

Canada is a world leader in science and research. We recognize the importance of the contributions made by francophone researchers and institutions.

[English]

In the report, the panel identifies interconnected challenges that stand in the way of an even stronger role for French-language research within Canada's research ecosystem. It recommends stronger research governance, a new dedicated investment and stronger government of Canada leadership. The report reminds us that access to

programs and services in both official languages is essential but that it is not, on its own, sufficient to ensure true equality.

Structural barriers can affect the creation, evaluation, dissemination and application of knowledge in French.

[Translation]

While recognizing these challenges, it's important to note that there have been and continue to be efforts to enhance the promotion of research in French. Federal partners are acting across three connected parts of the research pathway. These parts are access to funding; publication and discoverability; and system-wide coordination and accountability. Ensuring substantive equality means looking at the full pathway to federal funding, from a researcher's ability to prepare a strong application in French to the capacity of the system to assess it fairly.

[English]

The objective is straightforward. Researchers should have confidence that they can seek federal research funding in French and can be supported in doing so.

Applicants can submit proposals to the federal granting agencies in the official language of their choice. The agencies are working to strengthen their assessment practices and improve the information available to identify where disparities persist across programs, disciplines and regions. Better data will also help measure whether the actions we are taking are producing real results.

[Translation]

Under the action plan for official languages 2023-28, Canadian Heritage is providing \$900,000 in funding over three years to support Acfas's Service d'aide à la recherche en français. The service helps researchers in francophone minority communities strengthen funding applications and access federal research opportunities.

With respect to publication and discoverability, federal partners are working to make French-language research easier to publish, find, access and use.

This committee has already heard from Érudit regarding the essential infrastructure that the platform provides for publishing, preserving and facilitating research and access to research in French. The Canada Foundation for Innovation is a major funder of Érudit, including its Studia project to modernize the platform and improve the discoverability of scholarly content.

[English]

The recently renewed tri-agency open access policy will make agency-funded, peer-reviewed articles freely accessible at publication. This will help make publicly funded research, including research published in French, available to more researchers, institutions and communities.

In terms of coordination and accountability, no single organization controls all the levers affecting research in French, which is why effective collaboration among partners is critical. The Canada Research Coordinating Committee currently provides an established forum to facilitate that collaboration. Its membership is composed of senior leadership at ISED, Health Canada, the federal granting agencies, the Canada Foundation for Innovation and the National Research Council, along with the chief science adviser. They are working together to align efforts and advance common approaches.

[Translation]

Some of the panel's recommendations propose new governance mechanisms and new investments. They raise important questions regarding leadership, responsibilities, complementarity with existing programs and the resources needed to achieve sustainable results.

The panel has provided an important foundation and the federal partners are already taking action. The committee's study can help sharpen priorities, strengthen accountability and identify where further action would have the greatest impact.

I would be happy to answer any questions from the committee members.

• (1220)

[English]

The Chair: Thank you.

We will now proceed to Madam Lefebvre, representing the National Research Council of Canada.

Please go ahead for five minutes.

[Translation]

Julie Lefebvre (Vice-President, Emerging Technologies, National Research Council of Canada): Madam Chair and committee members, thank you for inviting us here today as part of your review of the report of the external advisory panel on the creation and dissemination of scientific information in French.

In the spirit of reconciliation, the National Research Council of Canada, or NRC, is seeking to build closer ties with indigenous peoples based on mutual respect, reciprocity and responsibility.

[English]

We are committed to excellence and innovation. This includes recognizing and supporting indigenous-inclusive research, bringing together indigenous knowledge, methods and priorities through meaningful collaboration with indigenous partners.

As Canada's largest federal research and innovation organization, the NRC advances knowledge, applies leading-edge technologies and works with partners to develop innovative solutions to Canada's economic, social and environmental challenges. With specialized facilities and expertise, the NRC brings together scientists, industry, academia and global partners to drive innovation.

[Translation]

The NRC has a workforce of 4,533 full-time equivalents and 2,313 scientists, engineers and technicians spread across 24 sites in Canada. As outlined in our 2024-29 strategic plan, our research activities span four key areas. These areas are digital and quantum technologies; health and biomanufacturing; climate change and sustainability; and support for foundational research. These activities support a number of national priorities such as housing, defence, emerging technologies and energy.

For 75 years, the NRC industrial research assistance program, or NRC IRAP, has been supporting Canadian small and medium-sized businesses in their innovation efforts.

[English]

NRC IRAP helps SMEs grow, innovate and contribute to Canada's industrial development. In fiscal year 2025-26, NRC IRAP served more than 10,000 clients, including more than 3,000 funded firms and more than 7,000 firms receiving advisory services. NRC IRAP's support helps sustain more than 16,000 jobs across Canada.

[Translation]

Getting back to the committee's study, the NRC carries out and facilitates research in French as part of its commitment to Canada's linguistic duality and an inclusive scientific ecosystem. The NRC's official language policies promote the use of both English and French and give its employees and clients access to its services and communications in the official language of their choice.

Scientists are also encouraged to publish their work in the official language of their choice. For over 20 years, the NRC has been helping the federal government achieve its official language objectives through a series of action plans. These plans include initiatives to facilitate access to scientific and technical information in both official languages. The NRC is also working with francophone universities, research organizations and businesses.

[English]

Examples of collaboration include relationships with francophone universities such as the Université de Sherbrooke, Polytechnique Montréal, Université de Montréal, Université de Moncton, or bilingual ones such as the University of Ottawa, as well as participation in research and innovation organizations, such as the Consortium for Research and Innovation in Aerospace in Québec.

[Translation]

Since 2020, the NRC and the Association canadienne-française pour l'avancement des sciences, or Acfas, have been working together to promote scientific research and culture and to strive for excellence in research.

● (1225)

[English]

Through NRC IRAP, the NRC also helps to strengthen the research and innovation capacity in francophone businesses. The NRC maintains a vibrant francophone workforce that contributes to its research. As of March 31, 2026, 28% of NRC's total workforce had selected French as their first official language, including 24% of its organizational STEM force.

[Translation]

The NRC is carrying out cutting-edge research on artificial intelligence. For over 20 years, it has been recognized for its expertise in multilingual natural language processing—such as machine translation, translation tools and the qualitative assessment of translation systems—as well as in responsible artificial intelligence.

On that note, thank you.

Ms. Cahill and I are ready to answer your questions.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you.

We will now proceed to our first round of questioning.

We'll begin with MP Godin for six minutes.

Please go ahead.

[Translation]

Joël Godin: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Once again, I would like to thank the witnesses for taking part in this process. Our goal is to improve. I want to thank them for being here.

My questions are more for the Department of Industry.

Mr. Vats, you're the assistant deputy minister for the science and research sector. My first question for you is the following. How long have you been in this position?

Nipun Vats: About eight years, I would say.

Joël Godin: As I was reading the report, one word really stood out to me. That word was “anglonormativity”. Since you have been serving in this role for eight years, is that your impression within your department?

Nipun Vats: What was that word again?

Joël Godin: It was “anglonormativity”. I was surprised as well. Actually, I can read you the definition before me. It's a system of structures, institutions and beliefs that imposes English as the dominant and universal norm, thereby marginalizing and discriminating against non-anglophone people. Is that your impression?

Nipun Vats: Within the department, I would say no, not really. We have obligations under the act. We also try to promote both official languages as part of our culture. In our own programs, as well as with granting agencies and other organizations that we work with, we try to ensure that this doesn't happen.

Joël Godin: We know that the new Official Languages Act was passed in 2023. What's changed for you since?

Nipun Vats: Are you referring to our own policies?

Joël Godin: I'm referring to the policies about French, the more vulnerable of our two official languages.

Nipun Vats: In far more cases now, it's mandatory for a manager to have to work in both official languages, for instance. There are other—

Joël Godin: Beyond the working level, there's more awareness about the situation of French. Let me rephrase: Since you read the report, what's been implemented?

Can you provide us with a timeline of what's been implemented to date from the report?

Nipun Vats: Yes, but can I submit that in writing? It'll be easier.

Joël Godin: Yes, absolutely.

Nipun Vats: We've accomplished a lot in recent years.

Joël Godin: I understand that you don't have the data with you.

However, if you were to give us a percentage, would you say you've implemented 25% of the report's recommendations? Would you say it's 75%, 50%?

Give me an idea. I understand that you're not committing—

Nipun Vats: Since the report was submitted to the government, I'd say that what's been implemented to date has been—

Joël Godin: Mr. Vats, let's move on. Please submit your answer in writing. It would be greatly appreciated.

I'd like to know more about your understanding of the francophone lens. As assistant deputy minister, explain your understanding of the francophone lens. In your mind, what does the francophone lens look like on a day-to-day basis?

Nipun Vats: Are you referring to the department?

Joël Godin: I mean you, personally. You're part of senior management, you see. You're an assistant deputy minister. There's the deputy minister and the minister. For you, as assistant deputy minister, what's your understanding, your definition of the francophone lens?

Nipun Vats: For myself, personally, the answer will be a bit more roundabout. First, my parents chose to teach me French when I was young. I was born in Nova Scotia, so that was a bit unusual for a family from India to do with their child. They wanted—

● (1230)

Joël Godin: I'm grateful to your parents, by the way.

Nipun Vats: For me, it's an advantage to be able to get by in French, even if I'm not completely bilingual. When I started working for the federal government, I always tried to make sure that our employees could express themselves in the language of their choice, so it wouldn't be necessary to—

Joël Godin: That's great about your daily operations, Mr. Vats. I'd like to thank your parents once again and congratulate you. You speak French very well. It's remarkable.

Have you observed a change in culture since the new Official Languages Act was passed in June 2023?

Nipun Vats: When the law changes, so do our obligations, but culture takes—

Joël Godin: I understand, Mr. Vats. I'm cutting you off because I know the law. I was involved in modernizing it. The decision was made and it's been enshrined in law since 2023. Now it has to filter down to the departments, you see. What's changed and what has supported scientific research in French since?

Nipun Vats: For research, it's more or less the same with government—

Joël Godin: It hasn't changed is what you're saying.

Nipun Vats: No, I just mean that there are our obligations and what we do, and there's also the culture. We don't always make progress by implementing requirements. It's also cultural in our department, in the granting agencies and research institutions.

Joël Godin: We could say it's systemic, then.

Nipun Vats: It's systemic. That's it. It takes a bit of time to—

Joël Godin: I have other questions. Thank you.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you. Your time is up.

We will now proceed to MP Eyolfson for six minutes.

Please go ahead.

Doug Eyolfson (Winnipeg West, Lib.): Thank you, Chair.

I'd like to thank all the guests for coming today.

Dr. Sangaré, one of the things we've noticed in regard to education is that post-secondary operating budgets fall strictly under provincial jurisdiction, whereas major research grants are generally federal. Given this split, can you give us any insight into how the provincial ministries of higher education are reacting to this report and what active steps they are taking to support it?

[Translation]

Yalla Sangaré: Thank you for the question, but I want to specify that I'm not a doctor. It's just Mr. Sangaré.

Regarding provincial governments, obviously, it's true that education is under provincial jurisdiction. However, part of the funding for francophone post-secondary institutions outside Quebec and anglophone institutions in Quebec also comes from the official languages program. Therefore, a part of our funding, on top of the what the granting agencies provide, comes from the federal government pursuant to the Official Languages Act.

Across the country, provincial governments are likely to react differently. You'll understand, for example, that in New Brunswick, there's a higher proportion of francophones, so the advisory panel's report is certainly of interest there. However, here, in Nova Scotia, where the francophone minority is really very small, obviously, there's been no reaction.

Overall, what I can say is that we're underfunded. I have to be direct, and these issues are known: post-secondary education is underfunded by provincial governments, not just in the case of francophone institutions. Of course, there's a lot of work to do there, but the report was commissioned by and for the federal government. We're here to tell the federal government to do everything possible to implement it fully and provide some predictability.

• (1235)

[English]

Doug Eyolfson: Okay, thank you.

Would you say that you would also prefer to have increased funding at the provincial level for these programs?

[Translation]

Yalla Sangaré: Certainly. Universities across the country in every province are chronically underfunded.

When provincial governments start reinvesting in education, we hope some of that investment will be directed to post-secondary French-language institutions. That investment will give provinces a certain advantage.

I'm in Nova Scotia, and now the country would like to turn towards European markets. Suddenly, people are realizing that a francophone institution here could help us break into the markets of Belgium, France, sub-Saharan Africa, Maghrib countries and so on. They're realizing that French represents an opportunity for Canada to break into other markets. That said, I don't want to focus only on the commercial side of things, but it helps the country to be more competitive if we can have strong research in both languages, especially in French.

[English]

Doug Eyolfson: All right. Thank you.

You made a reference that is part of what was going to be my next question. You mentioned in your remarks that research in French throughout the world has been decreasing. You mentioned that there has been outreach in France, and there are certain nations in Africa where French is a prominent language.

Have there been international efforts with Canadian francophone institutions with these international institutions to help reverse this trend?

[Translation]

Yalla Sangaré: We can also deploy more efforts through multi-lateral organizations. UNESCO comes to mind, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, which fights for cultural diversity and for research that is not conducted exclusively in English.

I must also say that our colleagues in Europe and elsewhere in the world, in other francophone countries, aren't much help, because they also publish their research in English. They might be facing the same pressures as our colleagues here. Besides the multi-lateral organizations, of course, there's the Organisation internationale de la Francophonie. Okay, it's more political, but we should be focusing our efforts on multilateral organizations.

[English]

Doug Eyolfson: I have 15 seconds, so I think that's my time. Thank you very much.

The Chair: Now we will proceed to MP Blanchette-Joncas for six minutes.

Please go ahead.

[Translation]

Maxime Blanchette-Joncas: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Good afternoon to the witnesses with us.

Mr. Vats, it's a pleasure to see you here again. Do you think your department provides sufficient funding to francophone universities in Canada?

Nipun Vats: That's not an easy question to answer.

Maxime Blanchette-Joncas: That's why I asked it.

Nipun Vats: There are several aspects to this. In terms of data, if we say that the proportion of funds allocated to francophone universities should be the same as that of francophones in the Canadian population, it isn't the case. Grant agency programs don't work that way. They always have review committees.

Maxime Blanchette-Joncas: I'll try to summarize it so the people following our work understand.

Do you think that the department you represent, the Department of Industry—we can't say “science” anymore because the word has been removed—provides adequate and sufficient funding to francophone universities in Canada?

[English]

Nipun Vats: I'm going to answer in English, if I may.

I don't think that's a very simple question. I think you have to ask yourself if the goal is to ensure that the percentage of funding that goes to francophone institutions is representative of the population. If that's your measure, then that's not the case. However, there are a number of things you're trying to do. There are assessments of excellence. There's whether people are actually applying. There may be issues with smaller institutions. Francophone institutions are, in general, small. There are a lot of small institutions, in addition to

some very large ones. There may be some economies of scale related to being a larger institution applying for grants.

I don't think it's a very simple question to answer. Maybe a better question to answer is, do francophone researchers have equitable access to the opportunity to apply for grants on a competitive basis?

• (1240)

[Translation]

Maxime Blanchette-Joncas: In the world of research, would you agree that funding is the sinews of war?

Nipun Vats: What do you mean by “sinews of war”?

Maxime Blanchette-Joncas: What is the most important parameter for competing in the world of research? Is it funding?

Nipun Vats: It's important, that's for sure.

Maxime Blanchette-Joncas: Okay.

Is it appropriate to use a funding data indicator? Francophone universities used to receive about 20% of federal funding. Now, 25 years later, that percentage is less than 15%. So, in 25 years, we've gone from 20% to less than 15%. Do you think this is a trend that truly supports scientific research and publication in French in Canada?

[English]

Nipun Vats: I'd have to look at the data, first of all. I don't know about those numbers.

[Translation]

Maxime Blanchette-Joncas: It was mentioned here by representatives of the Quebec university network.

[English]

Nipun Vats: I'll take a look at the numbers. If there is a reduction in the percentage of funding that's going to francophone universities, I would agree that it is more challenging for those institutions to actually conduct research in French. There may be reasons for that. I think we need to understand what's going on underneath the surface.

[Translation]

Maxime Blanchette-Joncas: I understand that it's very complex, but I think funding is a fairly important parameter. Without funding, there is no research.

I'll move on to another question. We're talking about recent investments. Your government made a historic announcement of \$1.7 billion for the Canada Impact+ emerging leaders program and the Eddie Goldenberg research chairs of Canada competition. Of the 64 chairs, only eight are at francophone universities. About 20% of universities in Canada are French-language institutions. Only eight out of 64 chairs, or 12.5%, if you do the math. How do you explain this under-representation in the distribution of research chair funding to francophone universities in Canada?

[English]

Nipun Vats: First of all, the second round of chairs has yet to be released. I think it's important to recognize that.

The other thing is that each program has its own kind of parameters. This program was focused in a way that would.... While there was a very strong effort made to ensure that smaller institutions would have greater opportunity to apply, the reality is it's more likely that this size of an award would go to a larger institution that has the infrastructure that would help to support the objectives of the program. That's not unique to francophone institutions.

[Translation]

Maxime Blanchette-Joncas: Was the linguistic aspect taken into consideration in the distribution of chairs?

[English]

Nipun Vats: Not explicitly, no.

[Translation]

Maxime Blanchette-Joncas: Okay.

I understand that your department promotes the values of equity, diversity and inclusion, particularly for under-represented groups, such as indigenous peoples, women, visible minorities and people with disabilities. I understand that the language aspect, French, isn't a parameter that is considered when you allocate and distribute research funding in Canada.

[English]

Nipun Vats: One thing to say is that French is on a different footing from equity, diversity and inclusion. There are legal obligations of a different kind for French.

If you look at the review processes that were carried out, ensuring that there were francophone reviewers and that EDI considerations were brought to bear was a part of the whole program. One of the co-chairs of the review process was a French speaker and a native francophone.

You have to look at the individual program and what it's trying to achieve to ask yourself whether the French language was appropriately considered in the program implementation.

The Chair: The time is up for MP Blanchette-Joncas.

Thank you, Mr. Vats.

[Translation]

Maxime Blanchette-Joncas: I think Mr. Vats wanted to say more, Madam Chair.

[English]

The Chair: Your time is up. Maybe you can come back to him in the second round.

[Translation]

Maxime Blanchette-Joncas: Madam Chair, I know you had to interrupt Mr. Vats because my time was up. I respect that. I would simply like to say that he can provide us with the additional explanations he wanted to give in writing.

• (1245)

Nipun Vats: I think I said everything I wanted to say, but if there's anything—

[English]

The Chair: When we come to the second round, you can ask the same thing and he can explain.

With that, we will now go to MP Ho for five minutes.

Please go ahead.

Vincent Ho: Thank you, Madam Chair.

My questions are going to be for Mr. Vats at the Department of Industry.

When you appeared before this committee back in 2022, you were asked whether federal research funding was equitable between the two official languages. It appears that you believe it was. You also mentioned that the average success rate for applications submitted in French was approximately equal to or, in some cases, better than for applications submitted in English.

Do you still stand by that statement today?

Nipun Vats: I think, on that basis, it's true, but there are different ways to measure this. Some of the issues that were raised in the report don't relate to success rates. They relate to shares of funding, as was referenced by Monsieur Blanchette-Joncas.

There's also the distinction between larger institutions and francophone institutions that are in communities in anglophone regions of the country.

It's hard to be purely definitive on this point, but on that data point, that's still true.

Vincent Ho: I understand there are other factors involved. Throughout the study, we've heard a number of witnesses so far, including today, talk about some of the barriers faced by French-speaking institutions, such as geography, institution size, program type and things like the availability of French-language reviewers.

Do you think these barriers are unique to French-language institutions, or are they perhaps barriers that are also faced by other institutions across the country?

Nipun Vats: There are questions around institutional size and capacity that are relevant whether you're an anglophone, a francophone or a bilingual institution.

I feel like the ultimate bureaucrat in saying it depends, but it is true that it depends on what you're looking at. There are elements that are common. There may be some elements that are specific to francophone institutions as well. I point particularly to francophone institutions that are in official language minority communities. Size is certainly an issue that comes up as well.

Vincent Ho: I'm going to take a look at some of the report's own evidence, which says that French applications to CIHR overall had a 29.8% success rate versus 25.3% for English. French SSHRC knowledge program applications were essentially identical to English at 42%. SSHRC partnership applications in French did substantially better at 61% versus 52%. It did say that French-language applications for NSERC programs, specifically from outside of Quebec, were at a disadvantage.

The report then recommends awarding additional points to research applications based on language of submission. Do you accept this recommendation, or does your department accept this recommendation?

Nipun Vats: We're looking at all of the recommendations. I think you have to be a bit careful about balkanizing individual communities, though. I think you have to be mindful of the concept.... I'm not saying it is a good thing or a bad thing. I'm just saying you have to think really carefully about what the implications of that kind of a change would be, and that's something that is currently being thought about.

Vincent Ho: When you talk about change, do you mean the recommendation that...?

Nipun Vats: No, I mean if you were to create some additional points for applications in French, that would be a bit challenging.

There's also the question of who applies in French versus who works in French.

We're looking at all of the recommendations of the report, but I think you need to unpack them a bit to be able to understand whether it makes sense to do or not.

• (1250)

Vincent Ho: Right.

The report also makes a recommendation to—

The Chair: MP Ho—

Vincent Ho: Is my time up?

The Chair: Yes, your time is up.

We will proceed to MP Rana for five minutes.

Please go ahead.

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

Thank you to all of the witnesses.

My question is for the National Research Council.

According to NRC's 2025-26 annual report, NRC researchers published 1,414 articles in peer-reviewed publications in 2025. How many were in English, in French, and in both languages, please?

Julie Lefebvre: I don't want to waste too much time. I can get you that number. I'm just reading, because we did try to put it in a list. I'm sorry about that.

Aslam Rana: What policies ensure your researchers' work is accessible in both official languages?

Karen Cahill (Vice-President, Corporate Services and Chief Financial Officer, National Research Council of Canada): Madam Chair, the NRC fosters a fully bilingual environment. We ensure that publications and reports are published in both official languages.

Aslam Rana: Thank you.

The report found that French plays a marginal role in research activities within the federal public service. What positive measures is the NRC taking under part VII of the Official Languages Act to support the creation and dissemination of scientific information in French?

Julie Lefebvre: We have a lot of initiatives which are on the go with respect to dissemination of information and scientific results in French. As you know, our archives actually puts out, for example, the abstracts, the keywords and the information of all of our scientific publications in both official languages so that they can be found, and one can reference them when doing searches online for knowledge in science.

In addition to that, we are working, as I mentioned, on applying tools, such as artificial intelligence, to be able to improve the translation and access to French, and the scientific results in French. While at this time the tools aren't adequate to maintain the integrity of the science, we continue to work to be able to get them to the point where you can go both from French to English and English to French in an equitable and equal way.

Those are the kinds of things we continue to do within the NRC.

Aslam Rana: What indicators do you use to measure the results?

Julie Lefebvre: Do you mean into the studies themselves?

Aslam Rana: Yes.

Julie Lefebvre: That's a good question. I don't know the details of some of those studies, but I can get some of that information for you, for sure.

Aslam Rana: Thank you.

Mr. Vats, since the Official Languages Act was modernized in 2023 and the action plan for official languages 2023-28 was adopted, what positive measures have the department and its agencies taken under part VII to support research in French?

Nipun Vats: There are things that have been done in terms of supports to scholarly journals. There have been efforts to increase the number of francophone reviewers who are reviewing applications for grants. I think you heard from Acfas as well. There have been investments in Acfas' programming to help support francophone applicants from outside of Quebec to succeed in applications. There have been investments through the CFI to Érudit, which provides an open access platform that is particularly beneficial to social sciences and humanities publications in French.

There are a range of things that have been done to try to improve the ability to conduct research in French and to have that research benefit Canadian communities as well.

Aslam Rana: Thank you.

The report recommends a research in French support and promotion fund worth at least \$40 million a year, roughly 1% of the federal research funding.

Do you think there are some existing federal programs or initiatives that could support the report?

• (1255)

Nipun Vats: There are specific recommendations in the report of the kinds of programs that already exist where you might consider investing more. These are things like the research chairs program and scholarships and fellowships. There are a range of tools that you could use. I would say that generally, though, we are looking at what might be the best approaches to address some of these issues.

Aslam Rana: Thank you very much.

The Chair: We will proceed to MP Blanchette-Joncas for two and a half minutes.

Please go ahead.

[Translation]

Maxime Blanchette-Joncas: Thank you, Madam Chair.

Mr. Vats, I'm asking your department to provide the committee with written responses.

First, please provide us with a detailed status of the implementation of the 17 recommendations in the 2023 report entitled "Revitalizing Research and Scientific Publication in French in Canada", indicating the measures taken, their implementation dates, the responsible department or agency, the resources allocated, the established indicators and targets, the results measured to date and, for those that haven't been implemented, the current status of their implementation and the reasons they haven't been implemented.

Please also provide us with the training instructions, action plans, follow-up tables and non-confidential governance documents received or produced since 2023 concerning the implementation of the recommendations in the report on research and scientific publication in French, specifying for each the date, the responsible authority and the unit responsible for follow-up.

Regarding the Canada global Impact+ research talent initiative, please provide us with any analysis on its linguistic impact or on the substantive equality between official languages conducted before or after its launch, as well as the targets and indicators used to measure its contribution to research in French. Please also provide, for each available cohort, the language data collected on applicants and incumbents, broken down by province, institution and amounts awarded. If certain language variables weren't collected, please indicate this explicitly.

I would also like to ask your department for the data available for the past five years on the language of production of scientific research carried out in federal science-based departments and agencies. Please provide, by department or agency, the number and proportion of research projects conducted primarily in French, original

scientific publications in French, English and bilingual, as well as the indicators used to track this evolution. Also, please explicitly identify the data that is not currently collected.

I would also ask you to indicate to the committee, still in writing, if there are any reports, studies or analyses assessing whether the funding granted to francophone universities in Canada is sufficient, adequate and equitable in light of their needs.

Finally, Ms. Lefebvre, I would ask you to tell us in writing whether the National Research Council of Canada can show, with supporting data, that French is actually used as a working and research language within the organization, and not merely as an official language of communication. Please provide us with available data for the past five years on the proportion of meetings held in French or in both official languages, on the use of French in internal communications, publications and scientific activities; on the language of supervision and management; and on the number of complaints or reports related to the inability to work in French. Please also indicate the corrective measures taken when deficiencies were identified.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you, MP Blanchette-Joncas.

It is like a motion you have read, and these types of motions have to be adopted by the committee if we are asking the witnesses, so I will ask the clerk for clarification.

The Clerk of the Committee (Cédric Taquet): The wording of your question sounds like an Order Paper question or a motion that would be brought to the committee.

I would just remind the members that we have no routine motions for the time prescribed to the witnesses to respond to those written questions. The only thing I do after a meeting is I send the written questions to the witnesses, and they will respond or not, depending on their own will.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you.

Nipun Vats: In the context of the study, some of these responses could take quite a while to pull together. When it comes to the Impact+ program, we haven't even announced all of the chairs yet, so the time frame for that program doesn't fit the study. What kind of time period is relevant for the study?

• (1300)

The Chair: The clerk will clarify your question.

The Clerk: To repeat, the only thing I can do at the end of this meeting is send the transcript of the member's questions to you. I will send you a request for a written response, but again, there are no routine motions adopted by the committee to give you a timeline to answer those questions and there are no routine motions that will actually force you to answer them.

Thank you.

The Chair: We will have to end our round of questioning here because of the time.

I have two questions to ask the committee members. One is in regard to the drafting instructions for Canada's dual use and research needs. The summary of evidence has been sent to all the members. What should be the deadline for submitting the drafting instructions?

Go ahead, MP McKelvie.

Jennifer McKelvie (Ajax, Lib.): Madam Chair, the analysts did a great job on the summary, which I think would serve as a great table of contents for preparation of the report. I sent an email in that regard, and I think that if the other parties could send any drafting instructions by the end of the week, it should be very simple. That gives them time to write the report. It's a very straightforward summary of evidence.

The Chair: Is there any input in regard to the deadline for submitting the drafting instructions from this side?

Can we say that Friday at 5:00 p.m. should be the deadline for submitting the drafting instructions from each party?

Are you asking for next Friday?

Taleeb Noormohamed: Given the time frame and given the break week, I was going to suggest that we can give it an extra week. We can go to the following Friday. Does that make more sense?

The Chair: MP McKelvie said this week. They are saying the following week.

MP Noormohamed.

Taleeb Noormohamed: I would say either we do it this week or we do it two weeks hence, because during the....

At the end of the day, two weeks is probably better.

The Chair: Are you saying by Friday, October 16, or by Friday, October 23? You're saying it should not be in the break week.

Taleeb Noormohamed: My preference would be this Friday, but if we can't do it this Friday.... I recognize a lot of the staff and others probably have things to do over the break week that they're not going to turn the proper attention to, so we may as well give it an extra week. I don't know how we can't get through three pages in a couple of days.

The Chair: MP Ho.

Vincent Ho: I would tend to agree. Two weeks from now, the 23rd, as I believe was suggested earlier, might make more sense and give some extra time, and it's in a sitting week.

The Chair: Is Friday, October 23, at 5:00 p.m. okay?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: The deadline for submitting the drafting instructions will be Friday, October 23.

I have one more thing. The next study, as per the rotation, will be the Conservative study. The committee will need to determine the topic of the next study. If the committee wants to initiate this as soon as possible next week—in this case, Tuesday, October 27—the committee will need to adopt a motion and submit a list of witnesses to the clerk by Friday, October 9, or by Monday, October 12.

The clerk needs at least 10 business days to organize a meeting, so everyone should come prepared on Thursday so that we can decide the date and the topic of the study.

With that, I want to thank our witnesses for appearing before the committee. Your input is important. On behalf of all the members, thank you.

The meeting is adjourned.

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