

QSR Report to Members – Meeting with Minister Pierre Duchesne

October 17, 2012

The Quebec Student Roundtable (QSR, also referred to by its French name, TaCEQ) asked to meet with the new minister for Higher Education, Research, Science and Technology, following the election of the Parti Quebecois government. QSR made this request to Mr. Pierre Duchesne, Minister, specifically in regards to the planned summit on higher education. Similarly to the other national student associations, the minister arranged a formal meeting. It took place on October 16 2012, on the 16th floor of the Marie-Guyart building in Quebec City.

QSR was represented at the meeting by Mr Paul-Emile Auger, Secretary General, Mr Sebastien Gagnon, Vice-Secretary General, and Mr Etienne Chabot, political advisor.

Mr Pierre Duchesne was accompanied by Mrs Christyne Tremblay, deputy minister, Mrs Esther Gaudreault, chief of staff, Mr Benoit Dubreuil, political advisor, and Mr Simon Poucher, a member of the summit team.

The meeting, which lasted about an hour long, was mostly focused on discussing the form that the education summit would take, as well as its content. After a brief presentation of QSR, the minister led us to the heart of the subject.

QSR put forward a number of different themes of interest for the summit. The idea behind the presentation of these themes is the possibility that the summit be a large event that would bring to light the complex problems and challenges that universities face. An ambitious event would allow for the exploration of multiple issues and bring together a true vision that goes beyond the question of only tuition fees.

The themes that QSR proposed and elaborated on are as follows:

- Research
- Teaching
- Financing
- Governance
- Student financial aid

As for the form that the summit takes, QSR did not try to restrict the number of places available for participants. QSR's vision in fact brings in two phases. The first phase would be that the summit travel around for at least a week, in which the summit team would organize hearings in Quebec City, Montreal and Rimouski. Interested members of civil society would be able to bring forward memorandums and testimonials, similar to a parliamentary commission. This and the summit would be supervised by an honorary president who would oversee the respect and independence of the process.

The second part of the summit would bring together different actors in the field of education and civil society in order to bring forward conclusions about the major issues. Mr Duchesne highlighted the difficulty of moving different actors from their specific positions. For this, he proposed the possibility to submit a list of more precise subjects to the partners in education. Following a delay, each national organization would produce a memorandum on each topic. The idea behind this would help organizations' to shift from a strict position to a series of realistic solutions, which could be more easily

digested by the other groups present. This could be a complimentary to a more general memorandum.

The Minister has committed to a serious process to ensure a constructive summit. His goal is to avoid a summit in which each group simply remains rooted to their own positions without possibility for compromise. He is working to properly address the important issues and to go right to the heart of the problem.

The inclusion of QSR in these initial discussions is a good sign from this government. The attitude is very different from the Liberal government. The change of government and the separation of the Ministry of Education, Leisure and Sport are good opportunities to come together in a national debate. QSR intends to be fully engaged in the process that will bring us toward the higher education summit. We firmly believe that this debate about university is essential for the future of Quebec.