



Motion Regarding *Conseil national des universités*

Whereas, one of the 'chantiers' (or workgroups) coming out of the Summit on Higher Education is to make recommendations for an independent university oversight body called the *Conseil national des universités* and determine its mandate and composition;

Whereas, SSMU, as part of TaCEQ, will be making a submission to the process with its recommendations;

Whereas, the deadline for submission of documents to this process is May 15, 2013;

Whereas, the next TaCEQ meeting to discuss the topic will be on April 28, 2013;

Whereas, SSMU previously has had no mandate regarding a body of this kind;

Resolved, that the SSMU adopt the following report and recommendations on the subject, and bring these recommendations to the next TaCEQ meeting.

Moved by:

Robin Reid-Fraser, Vice-President (External Affairs)
Zachary Rosentzveig, Clubs and Services Representative

FOR APPROVAL



Conseil National des Universités

PART I: BACKGROUND

Context

During the themed meetings in the lead up to the PQ's Summit on Higher Education, there were several proposals made by groups participating in the process for the creation of an independent body which would provide some sort of oversight and guidance for universities in Quebec. FEUQ, CREPUQ, FQPPU and CSN were among the organizations that made this recommendation, but with differing opinions about the mandate, power and composition that the body would have.

At the February 25-26 Summit meetings, the government announced that one of the '*chantiers de travail*' (roughly translated as 'work groups') coming from the Summit process would be to come up with a report and recommendations for an independent coordination and oversight body, calling it the *Conseil national des universités*. All participants in the Summit process were invited to provide input until May 15, and an initial report is expected on the 28th of June.

As such, SSMU through TaCEQ will be providing input into this process. At the TaCEQ meeting on March 13 it was decided that each member association would be responsible for coordinating the input into each *chantier*, though more than one member association will provide content. SSMU agreed to take care of the coordination on this topic.

History

In 1968, following the Parent Commission and Report, the provincial government at the time mandated the creation of a body called the *Conseil des Universités*. This body had the mandate to make recommendations to the Minister of Higher Education and Science (the ministry of the time) in regards to a number of issues related to universities.

The topics that it was mandated to explore included the following: the needs of higher education related to the scientific, cultural and socioeconomic needs of the province; long term goals of higher education; development and creation of educational institutions; accounting methods for higher education institutions, and an examination of their individual budgets and financial needs; coordination and collaboration among institutions; the creation or revision of laws related to higher education and research.

The *Conseil's* composition had the following formula: a president; 9 members from universities themselves, following consultation with administration, professors and students; 4 members as representation from the business community; the president of the *Commission de la recherche universitaire* and; two government officials.

The *Conseil* went on to produce reports on a number of subjects, including the role of universities in professional training, distance education, international students, university research and methods of coordination among universities in the province.



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In 1993 the *Conseil* was abolished, and some of its work was split between the *Conseil supérieur de l'éducation* and CREPUQ. However, this was not the case for all the work that the *Conseil* had formerly been doing, and gaps remain since that time.

Other Bodies

As mentioned in the previous section, there are other bodies at the provincial level which conduct research related to post-secondary education, and provide input to the government. One of them is the *Conseil supérieur de l'éducation*, which has a mandate to “prepare briefs or give its opinion to the Minister on any education-related issues; seek or welcome requests, advice and suggestions on any education-related issues from organizations or groups as well as the public in general; conduct or commission studies and research which it deems useful or necessary for the exercising of its functions.”^{vi} In this capacity, the *Conseil* conducts research related to all levels of education, from preschool to adult and continuing education. They publish reports, memoranda, and legislative documents, including regular reports on the overall needs and state of education in the province.

Another body which has already been mentioned is the *Conférence des recteurs et des principaux des universités du Québec* (CREPUQ), which is the research and lobbying body representing the top administrators of the Quebec universities. At the time of writing this, the rector of Université Laval has just announced that Laval will be leaving CREPUQ, and the rector of Université de Montréal has also indicated that he is considering it, citing different needs and opinions of the charter universities in the province compared to those in the Université du Québec system.

Drama aside, the organization has several main mandates. One is to act as a roundtable, where the administrators can share ideas and information. It also commissions research on topics of interest to the members. Finally, it lobbies to the government and other actors both in the province and internationally, whether in asking for financial or political support from the government on an issue or promoting its institutions to other countries.ⁱⁱ

Concerns and Institutional Gaps

There exist concerns about both the *Conseil supérieur* and CREPUQ, as well as a sense that there are gaps which have been left in terms of institutional mandates since the dissolution of the *Conseil des universités*.

Conseil supérieur de l'éducation

Concerns regarding the *Conseil supérieur de l'éducation* are that its mandate is too broad and vague, and that although it is an arms-length body from the government and has an advisory role in that capacity, that it does not have the mandate to make binding recommendations on particular issues. There are committees for each level of education within the *Conseil* but particularly because higher education is now under a new Ministry, it may be preferable to have a body which deals separately with questions specific to Cegeps and universities. Furthermore, the composition of the *Conseil* is not particularly inclusive, as it currently only has two students (both PhD level) on its Commission on University Education and Research, and no non-academic staff representation.



CREPUQ

The criticisms of CREPUQ mostly revolve around the dual role that it plays in both commissioning research but also working as a political lobby group. It seems inappropriate to give special status to CREPUQ as a research and recommendation body when CREPUQ has taken particular positions on controversial matters such as how much tuition students should pay, or the composition of university decision-making bodies. And CREPUQ has even less inclusive of a composition than the *Conseil*, since it is only the top administrators of all the member universities.

That being said, CREPUQ itself presented a recommendation at the first themed pre-Summit meeting for an independent oversight body. The main focus for the body that it proposed was the quality of courses and programs, but it does include things like best practices for governance and the examination of the real financial needs of universitiesⁱⁱⁱ.

Institutional Gaps

Many of the organizations which have already made the recommendation for the creation of a new independent oversight body cite a number of important issues that are not within the mandate of any organization currently existing. Those issues include the following:

- **The creation and oversight of standardized financial reporting parameters and mechanisms.** Currently all universities must submit their audited financial statements and budgets to the Minister of Higher Education, Research, Science and Technology and to the National Assembly, but there is no standardized method so it can be difficult to compare the information across institutions.
- **Communication and coordination in regards to the creation of new programs.** If there is more than one institution in the same region providing a particularly resource-intensive program, it may be useful to make sure that communication is happening around that ahead of time so that the programs do not necessarily overlap and be twice as expensive. Similarly, there is no body which has examined which currently existing programs should be counted as fundamental program offering that every institution should have to some degree, and which ones may be counted as specific to particular kinds of universities.
- **The evaluation of the quality of existing programs.** The evaluation of programs is currently part of CREPUQ's mandate, but because CREPUQ is composed of university administrators, the need for an independent body has been brought up.
- **Research and recommendations related to the building of satellite campuses.** Because satellite campuses are both expensive and often cited as an example of unnecessary inter-university competition, it has been recommended by a number of groups that there should be a body to examine proposals for new campus development before those projects are allowed to go ahead.



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- **Assessment of the true resource needs of universities.** Over the last several years in particular there have been calls for a dramatic increase of funding to post-secondary institutions, some figures in the hundreds of millions of dollars. However, there have increasingly also been questions about where money in universities is currently going, particularly because many details about university spending remain either confusing or not easily available. There has also been no overall, independent assessment of the actual resource needs of the university system as a whole in order to come up with a dollar amount that everyone can agree on.
- **Promote collaboration over competition.** The current system of inter-university competition is seen by many as being unnecessary and expensive. Efforts to gain a certain type of ranking or attract certain types of students can demand much in the way of personnel and financial resources of institutions, and may not actually translate in to improved student, staff or faculty experiences. Many groups that have asked for an oversight body have emphasized that it should function in a manner that promotes collegiality and collaboration.

PART II: SSMU'S POSITION

Generally speaking, SSMU is supportive of the notion of creating an independent oversight body to deal specifically with university-related issues and questions. There is a clearly a need for an organism which can commission research and make recommendations that are not tied to particular political positions. Furthermore, creation of standardized accounting methods and reports will make it much easier for other groups to analyze the information in a useful way. SSMU's specific recommendations are below.

Mandate

We believe that the *Conseil national des universités* should have the following mandate:

- 1) **Create standardized financial reporting mechanisms for all university institutions**, so that they may be easily compared and analyzed.
- 2) **Evaluate the current spending by all Quebec universities and evaluate the financial, material and personnel needs of each.** This should be done while keeping in mind the autonomy and individual missions of each institution. However, it should prioritize the financial decisions that are most relevant to current campus life such as adequate learning environments for all students and fair wages and workloads for all university employees.
- 3) **Publish clear information about how universities are financed.** Many comments from our members over the past year have revolved around how difficult it is to actually understand where public funding, tuition fees and other funds are allocated across the universities. We feel that it is essential that this information be made easily available, and that this the appropriate body to take on that task.



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- 4) **Assess campus development projects, particularly the creation of satellite campuses.**
All campus development will be expensive, and particularly when there are multiple institutions with ambitious development projects it can create quite a financial demand. We believe that an independent body is necessary to evaluate the relevance, motivations and cost of these projects. This should include assessments of not only the financial impact of campus development, but also the social impact on the area where it is being proposed.
- 5) **Creation of new programs.** If universities are looking to implement new programs, particularly those which would require much in the way of physical resources and thus be expensive to put in place, should be discussed by the *Conseil*. The *Conseil's* discussion should take in to account whether there are similar programs planned for universities in the same geographic region, what the resource needs of implementing the program will be, and how the program would relate to other existing programs at the same university.
- 6) **Promote coordination and collaboration among the entire Quebec university network.** While universities should still maintain their autonomy and the ability to set their own priorities, we feel that a more global vision of the workings of the Quebec university network is needed. As universities make multi-year plans, it is important that there still be adequate communication between them and with the government so that there can be a clear picture of what the future of higher education in Quebec will look like and how much it will cost.
Furthermore, there should be an effort made by all universities to collaborate with one another for the good of the system as a whole, rather than focusing on a competitive atmosphere.

Composition

We feel that it is essential that all members of the university communities have seats at the table, including students, faculty, support staff and administrators. While we feel that the provincial student associations the FEUQ, ASSÉ and TaCEQ should all be present, there must also be clear ways that campus student associations which are not members of a larger organization can also contribute their feedback.

We also feel that there should be members of the *Conseil* who are not directly involved in the university system. However, it is essential that 'external' members represent a wide range of other sectors, rather than just coming from large business and industry organizations. Sectors such as community service, public health, arts and culture should all be included. External members should not be a majority.

We also feel that it is important that there be at least one government representative on the body. However, we feel that it is essential that this person be someone who is not a partisan representative,



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so not a government Minister but rather be a bureaucrat with professional rather than political experience.

Functioning

We feel that there are several essential elements in terms of how this body will carry out its work.

Collaboration and Lack of Hierarchy

Since this organization should seek to promote collaboration, it should function in the same manner. Similarly, there should be no specific hierarchy to the body in that no particular voice should carry more weight than another. All different members should work together to set goals and ways of working, and then commit to carrying out those goals in a constructive and productive way.

Transparency

As a body which will be examining a number of important topics and making recommendations upon them that could influence many people, we feel it is absolutely essential that the *Conseil* function in a way that is as transparent as possible. The agenda for meetings of the *Conseil* should be publicly available before they occur, as should any reports or other input that the *Conseil* will be discussing. Furthermore, any research that the *Conseil* should include a public research proposal, and a list of any contributors to the research process.

Consultation and Outreach

The *Conseil* should establish robust and effective consultation methods in its work. For any research that the *Conseil* intends to take on, they should provide a notice to all student associations, university labour unions and associations, and university administrations about the work they intend to carry out. Furthermore, this information should be publicly available on the website of the *Conseil* and open to comment. The *Conseil* should encourage feedback about both the content of the research and any groups which they will be seeking information from, and be open to suggestions for others to include.

Furthermore, the *Conseil* should actively engage in outreach to other groups and organizations which may not be automatic stakeholders in their work. For example, if they are discussing the creation of new programs, they should seek out input from students at the secondary or CEGEP level, to find out if these programs seem relevant to student who will soon be entering university. If they are examining a proposal for a campus development project, then feedback from the people living in the area where the development will happen must be sought out as equal participants to those from the university itself.

Conclusion

Generally speaking, the SSMU feels that an independent body meant to help coordinate the work of universities across the province could be a helpful tool in resolving some of the major questions and issues that currently exist in the university system. However, in order to do so the *Conseil* must be proactive and inclusive, and function in a way that fosters collaboration among various stakeholders. The *Conseil* should not just serve the government as an advisory and research body, but should seek to respond to the needs of all facets of Quebec society. Thus, it must work to make its work



transparent, and endeavor to make the functioning of the Quebec university system as a whole more easily understood and accessible. Furthermore, the *Conseil* must seek input from not only those who are already active participants in university affairs but work to engage groups that may not automatically be thought to be relevant to those questions. Indeed, if we are to recognize post-secondary education as a public good and an important part of larger society, then the work that the *Conseil* does should reflect this belief.

ⁱ <http://www.cse.gouv.qc.ca/EN/Mandat/index.html>

ⁱⁱ <http://www.crepuq.qc.ca/spip.php?article31&lang=fr>

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http://www.mesrst.gouv.qc.ca/fileadmin/administration/librairies/documents/Contributions_qualite/CONTR_CREP_UQ_proposition_premiere_rencontre_thematique.pdf

For Approval