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# **Standing Committee on Human Resources, Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities**

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EVIDENCE

**Wednesday, October 25, 2006**

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**Chair**

**Mr. Dean Allison**

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## Standing Committee on Human Resources, Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities

Wednesday, October 25, 2006

•(0840)

[English]

**The Chair (Mr. Dean Allison (Niagara West—Glanbrook, CPC)):** I'd like to call this meeting to order.

[Translation]

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2) and the motion adopted by the Committee on Thursday, May 11, 2006, the Committee resumed its study of Employability in Canada.

This morning, we'll hear from the representatives of the Centrale des syndicats démocratiques, the Fédération étudiante universitaire du Québec, the Fondation de la langue française pour l'innovation sociale et scientifique and SPHERE-Québec.

Each group will have seven minutes to make its presentation, then we'll have a period of questions and answers.

Mr. Giroux, I turn the floor over to you. You have seven minutes.

**Mr. Philippe-Olivier Giroux (President, Conseil national des cycles supérieurs, Quebec Federation of University Students):** I'm going to make my presentation in French.

Mr. Chair, ladies and gentlemen members, we would like to thank you for inviting us to make a presentation today.

First, I would briefly like to explain what our organization is. The Conseil national des cycles supérieurs de la Fédération étudiante universitaire du Québec is an organization with a mandate to defend and promote the rights and interests of masters and doctoral students at Quebec university institutions. We represent them to the public and to the principal players in the education and research system. We represent approximately 30,000 members.

We would like to give you our recommendations on employability in Canada. We are going to address this question from the standpoint of highly skilled manpower training and we propose three action approaches. First, we propose that transfer payments for postsecondary education be increased to ensure basic funding for universities, second, that funding for university research be increased in order to train innovative labour force and, third, that university research be fostered by promoting professional employment for masters and doctoral graduates.

The first approach consists in increasing federal transfers for postsecondary education. To place Canada among the top five countries in the area of research and development investment, we think it is essential to invest more in our universities. In the mid-

1990s, the government reduced transfer payments for universities, and Canadian universities have since had considerable difficulty bearing the costs of what is called core funding, that is to say for hiring professors, funding libraries — to enable them to buy books — renewing computer hardware and constructing buildings. We propose that transfers for postsecondary education be increased by \$4.9 billion, that is to say that they be restored to the levels of the mid-1990s, before the cuts, and that they be indexed to costs and increased university staff. This measure is essential in enabling universities to carry out their mission, which is to train a highly skilled labour force.

The idea is not only to increase transfers, but also to ensure that those transfers are dedicated to postsecondary education. Currently, transfers to the provinces for postsecondary education are included in the Canada Health and Social Transfer. Splitting that transfer and earmarking the portion of the contribution that goes to postsecondary education would make it possible to achieve three extremely positive objectives. The first is to identify the federal government's contribution to postsecondary education and that of the provincial governments. The second is to respect the jurisdictions of the provinces, because education is a provincial jurisdiction, and transferring the money would make that possible. The third is to maintain accountability. At present, since the money is included in a transfer for very general social programs, the provinces can afford to use those amounts for purposes other than postsecondary education. We think these are the main advantages of making a dedicated transfer.

The second approach is to increase funding for university research to ensure the university teaching body is renewed. I'm going to cite an interesting statistic. According to the Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada, 34,000 professorial positions will have to be filled by 2010. It is therefore necessary to give our universities the chance to recruit the best researchers to fill those positions. To do that, we think money must be invested in university research. We suggest two ways of achieving that end: increase the budgets of the organizations that subsidize research and cover direct research costs in full. The budgets of the subsidizing organizations that fund researchers could be increased, which would enable researchers to conduct research and train students, and would pay students scholarships enabling them to study at the masters and doctoral levels and to acquire the skills they can use in the job market. We think it is important to meet the demands of these organizations which subsidize research. To that end, we propose that \$295 million be invested each year until 2010 to enable those subsidizing organizations to achieve their objectives, which they have set in the context of their strategic plans.

Those subsidizing organizations are the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council, the Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council and the Canadian Institutes of Health.

We suggest that the research environment of university institutions be reinforced and that indirect research costs be covered. What are those indirect costs? They are the costs arising from the research contracts that the government signs with universities. It signs many such contracts. Currently, the federal government pays the provinces the equivalent of 27% of the cost of such research, whereas, according to a number of estimates, it should be paying 65%. We therefore hope that the government will pay the actual value of indirect research costs, that is to say 65%.

The third approach is to reward university research by promoting professional employment for graduates. In our view, the individuals who have been trained are the main product of university research. It is necessary to help them transfer their knowledge to businesses and the community. To promote and facilitate professional employment for graduates, CNCS proposes that more funding be granted for programs that make it possible to bridge the gap between the universities and the work place, such as the Community-University Research Alliances, or CURA, the Humanities Research Council of Canada and the Industrial Research Assistance Program of the National Research Council of Canada, or NRC-IRAP. Among other things, this will enable small and medium-size businesses that currently conduct very little research and development to hire qualified staff, masters and doctoral graduates who will enable them to develop more innovative, higher value-added products.

That completes our recommendations. I'll briefly sum up our demands: increase transfers for postsecondary education; split off the transfer for postsecondary education to underscore the federal government contribution; reinvest in the three organizations that subsidize research; increase the payment of indirect research costs to cover actual cost; and promote professional employment of masters and doctoral graduates as a way of transferring knowledge from the universities to society and business.

Thank you very much. I'll be pleased to answer your questions.

● (0845)

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Mr. Beausoleil, I turn the floor over to you. You have seven minutes.

**Mr. Jean-Marc Beausoleil (Agent de développement de solutions et de projets, Fondation de la langue française pour l'innovation sociale et scientifique):** Good morning. My name is Jean-Marc Beausoleil, and I work for the Fondation de la langue française pour l'innovation sociale et scientifique.

Before starting my presentation, I'd like to mention two things. First of all, our organization would like to thank Ms. Denise Savoie for inviting us here to present this brief. Second, over the next seven minutes, we're going to tell you who we are, our mandate, the reasons for our appearance here concerning employability and our recommendations, which you will find on page 16 of the document that will be distributed in Ottawa.

The Fondation de la langue française pour l'innovation sociale et scientifique is a national, non-profit, non-governmental agency consisting of professors, academics, professionals and ordinary citizens, which was established in 2000 and is registered with the government.

Our organization is funded by contributions from our members. We work across Canada toward solving the problem of the shortage of French-language books and teaching resources at the post-secondary level, including occupational training. This situation has a direct impact on employability, which is recognized by all in the education community in Canada, as well as in the Canadian work place.

We have a pan-Canadian mandate to solve the problem of the shortage of books and teaching resources in French at the postsecondary level. We are supported by the Canadian education community and working world as a whole, in particular by the school boards of British Columbia, the Montreal School Commission, university associations, unions, associations of Francophones outside Quebec, the Canadian Council on Learning and others.

We are speaking to you this morning on behalf of all French-speaking Canadians. The problem is a problem at the federal government level. It does not concern education as such, but rather the basis of education. It concerns equal opportunity for French-speaking and English-speaking Canadians, the Official Languages Act, training in the Armed Forces — which is the largest pan-Canadian ministry of education — the fiscal imbalance and employability.

This problem is therefore national in scope because it concerns all French-speaking Canadians across Canada and their employability. The shortage of books and teaching resources in French in the postsecondary institutions is a form of institutionalized discrimination across Canada.

The employability situation in Canada is both simple and utterly incoherent. When students attend a French-language postsecondary institution to receive an education in French, as they are entitled to do, 75%, if not 90%, of their books and teaching resources are in English.

This situation causes knowledge transmission problems, increases the number of drop-outs, undermines worker training, contributes to the impoverishment of the French-speaking Canadian population, by promoting ignorance and the brain drain, thus undermining wealth creation. All these factors harm employability.

The shortage of books and teaching resources in French at the postsecondary level handicaps understanding. For some, that handicap is 100%, for others 10%. The average handicap in knowledge transmission is 18%. That's the difference between a very good surgeon and an average surgeon, a very good engineer and an average engineer. And I'm not talking about all those who don't enrol in postsecondary institutions because of the handicap that the shortage of French-language teaching resources represents.

This problem will ultimately affect the English Canadian education system. Allow me to explain. The lack of teaching resources in French at postsecondary institutions will result over the long term in a loss of control over our education system, among both English- and French-speaking Canadians, and of our economy, and thus a loss of control over our employability policies.

● (0850)

This scenario is not unrealistic. Currently, the only thing preventing U.S. postsecondary institutions from establishing themselves here, under article 11 of NAFTA, is the cultural exclusion.

The cultural exclusion, that means the books at the postsecondary institutions of the French Canadian education system. I hope I haven't strayed too far from my point. I'm not used to going so fast.

Ultimately, we wanted to mention two main points to you this morning. There is a form of discrimination across Canada. It's not normal, and it is not worthy of Canada. In some respects, we find ourselves with two levels: English Canadians have access to resources entirely in English, and French Canadians don't have access to resources in French. That automatically creates discrimination and an imbalance. Furthermore, it works against equality of opportunity between the two communities.

If we don't solve this problem, we'll one day be forced to subsidize U.S. postsecondary institutions. They will come and establish themselves here and will demand that we subsidize them because, in any case, everything operates in English here. Forget the cultural exclusion: that doesn't exist.

You'll find our recommendations on page 6 of the brief we'll be submitting to you. Thank you very much. I hope we've been clear on the subject of conditions.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Beausoleil.

The briefs will not be distributed until they have been translated.

[English]

I'd like to move on to our next speaker, Madame Moreau.

[Translation]

You have seven minutes, madam.

● (0855)

**Ms. Nancy Moreau (Director general, SPHERE-Québec (Soutien à la personne handicapée en route vers l'emploi au Québec)):** Thank you.

Mr. Chair, ladies and gentlemen, members of the committee, thank you for receiving us this morning and allowing us to speak to you.

The corporation SPHERE-Québec (Soutien à la personne handicapée en route vers l'emploi au Québec) is a non-profit organization established by partners interested in job integration and training for persons with disabilities.

SPHERE-Québec's goal is to promote participation in economic and social life by a larger number of persons with disabilities isolated from the labour market. To achieve this objective, in 1997, the Department of Human Resources and Social Development Canada gave SPHERE-Québec's team a mandate to implement the individual measures of the Opportunities Fund for Persons with Disabilities.

SPHERE-Québec offers its services through four offices in the heart of the province's main regions. Its project officers take part at every stage of regional cooperation on employment and work in close cooperation with community partners. This cooperative effort with the partners is moreover apparent from the make-up of SPHERE-Québec's board of directors, which consists of representatives of employers, unions and the main organizations working with persons with disabilities in the province.

Here's a little background.

SPHERE-Québec is filing this brief with the committee to inform it of its experience with the employability of persons with disabilities. One of the first findings that we can make is that a large percentage of persons with disabilities are currently inactive but feel they are able to work. However, these people say they experience problems of all kinds, such as negative perceptions by employers, transportation problems and a lack of training and experience. And yet persons with disabilities constitute a skilled labour force and are part of the response to the major labour shortage problem we are facing.

Here's our first recommendation.

SPHERE-Québec recommends that the Opportunities Fund for Persons with Disabilities be made permanent.

In light of employability statistics for persons with disabilities, much clearly remains to be done. Since 1997, more than 4,000 persons with disabilities in Quebec have improved their employability by taking advantage of one of the program's measures. To date, approximately half have remained active, that is to say employed, self-employed or at an educational institution. Based on the decisive results of the Opportunities Fund in Quebec, SPHERE-Québec recommends that the program become permanent.

Here's our second recommendation.

SPHERE-Québec recommends that additional budgets be granted to the Opportunities Fund to introduce pre-employability pilot projects. Persons with disabilities who live far away from the labour market have numerous needs that create as many barriers to job entry. That's why the partners in the Quebec regions are inventing new job entry models and implementing them in the context of concrete projects.

SPHERE-Québec is already funding a number of pre-employability pilot projects and encouraging the spread of these models. These innovative projects, backed by the communities, are built not only on the basis of the employability needs of persons with disabilities, but also in accordance with the region's socio-economic structure. Persons with disabilities who have the opportunity to take part in a pre-employability pilot project enter the labour force better prepared, more skilled and thus more able to keep their jobs and develop.

Other models could be tested with young persons with disabilities to improve their employability levels.

Based on the suitability of these pre-employability projects for the clientele, SPHERE-Québec hopes to continue its cooperation on pilot projects and, consequently, recommends that additional funding be allocated to this kind of project in the Opportunities Fund.

I'm going to let Ms. Vincent give you a concrete example to illustrate how well cooperation among partners is working.

**Ms. Lyn Vincent (Project Agent, SPHERE-Québec (Soutien à la personne handicapée en route vers l'emploi au Québec)):** Here's an example of an employability development project that we have supported in Montérégie.

The project was implemented by the Institut québécois des ressources humaines en horticulture. Since this sector has suffered from a labour shortage, the Institute, in cooperation with other regional partners, has introduced horticultural training specifically intended for persons with disabilities. As the training cost has been absorbed by the school commission, the Opportunities Fund has reimbursed participants' transportation expenses, training materials and other costs directly related to their disabilities. This is a group of persons living with mental disabilities and pervasive behavioural disorders.

The purpose was to promote participants' entry into the regular labour market. And the result: 60% of participants entered the labour market.

● (0900)

**Ms. Nancy Moreau:** Here's our third recommendation.

SPHERE-Québec recommends that the Opportunities Fund be improved to take into account the actual needs of persons with disabilities.

Persons with disabilities isolated from the labour market are suffering from a triple disability. In addition to their functional limitations, they generally have little or no training and little or no work experience. For these people, the path to employment involves a number of step consistent with the rate of development of their employability.

The needs of persons with disabilities are not apparent solely at the start of the process, but may arise from time to time once they are employed. To maintain their employability levels, it is essential that the Opportunities Fund provide support to promote their employment retention.

In view of the many needs of persons with disabilities and the necessity of promoting their employment over the long term, SPHERE-Québec recommends, among other things, that consideration be given to the idea of funding job retention activities in the context of the Opportunities Fund.

Here's our fourth recommendation.

SPHERE-Québec wishes to remain the preferred partner in Quebec for the implementation of the Opportunities Fund.

Still with the same team since the Opportunities Fund was established in 1997, SPHERE-Québec has obviously developed undeniable expertise in assessing the actual needs of persons with disabilities. The SPHERE-Québec team has become part of the community's resources by putting in place a structure making it possible to work together with those resources in order to respond more effectively to the needs of persons with disabilities, which avoids overlap and helps to optimize the use of each resource.

Lastly, through its original structure, expertise, efficient management, promotional tools and results since 1997, SPHERE-Québec is the ideal candidate to remain the preferred partner in Quebec in implementing the Opportunities Fund for persons with disabilities.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Ms. Moreau.

Mr. Clermont, you have the floor for seven minutes, please.

**Mr. Pierre-Alexandre Clermont (As an Individual):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Committee members, we are here to give you our observations on the implementation of the Federal Student Work Experience Program, commonly called FSWE. On behalf of the students hired under that program, we are going to present a summary of the brief on the implementation of FSWE and its impact on employability. For analysis purposes, we refer to our work experience at Parks Canada, at the Chambly Canal historic site.

**Ms. Marie-Pier Archambault (As an Individual):** First, let's analyze the discriminatory nature of the irregular implementation of the Student Employment Policy. That policy states in a number of places the principle of non-discrimination on the basis of student status. Furthermore, at paragraph 5.3(c), it states:

[...] managers wishing to assign students a full set of classified duties should instead appoint them to a classified position through the regular staff process, and pay them at the classified rate.

At the Chambly Canal, students hired as part of the FSWEF perform the duties of a classified position, but receive the rate of pay relating to the diploma required for the position, that is to say a high school diploma. This situation has the effect of causing serious discrimination toward the students, since they are paid \$8.95 an hour, compared to a rate of \$19.85 an hour for students occupying a classified position. This discrimination has a harmful effect on employability in the federal public service. The students who are the victims of this situation lose confidence in the machinery of government, which results in sharply diminished interest in having a career in the public service. The government thus finds itself deprived not only of a high-quality labour force, but also of the expertise acquired by the students as part of their employment. Consequently, the irregular implementation of the policy creates a discriminatory situation resulting in a diminished view of government as an employer.

Second, notwithstanding the foregoing analysis, let us look at the impact on employability of a lack of reasonable progression up the salary scale at the time of subsequent assignments. On this point, Schedule A of the students' employment contract at Parks Canada recognizes the principle of progression in compensation based on education through the development of guidelines for determining pay rates. Managers are thus recognized as having discretionary authority regarding pay rates to be applied to students.

At the Chambly Canal, all student employees receive the same rate of pay, despite their years of experience. For example, one student employee studying for a master's degree who has three years' experience is receiving the same rate of pay as a new student employee who has just earned a high school diploma. Consequently, it may be concluded that managers are not using their discretionary authority. The resulting effects on employability are not negligible. It must also be recognized that the more students specialize through postsecondary training, the more their education costs increase. This has serious consequences. Since students are unable to save enough money during the summer, they must work more during regular academic sessions. In some cases, this situation extends the time required to earn a diploma, which entails additional costs to society, since this specialized labour force is slow in entering the labour market. We must therefore consider student compensation as an investment. Consequently, the lack of a reasonable progression in student pay scales results in additional costs for both students and society.

• (0905)

**Mr. Pierre-Alexandre Clermont:** Third, let's analyze the monitoring and control mechanism for student hiring at Parks Canada. The Public Service Commission has authority to conduct monitoring and audit activities with respect to the implementation of the FSWEF under paragraph 7(b) of the Student Employment Policy. However, in view of the agency status that Parks Canada enjoys, the Public Service Commission does not consider it has authority to conduct monitoring and audit activities with respect to it. Consequently, agency status has the effect of excluding the agency from any form of monitoring and audit, and thus opens the door to discrimination and violation of the rights of those we claim to be the future and wealth of our Canadian community.

In light of the established facts, here's a list of solutions that we propose in order to correct the deficiencies in the FSWEF's implementation. They may be summarized as follows: establish a commission of inquiry to identify all possible violations of the policy and student employment conditions; create or grant an independent agency power to investigate any assignment that is the subject of a complaint or submit to it every organization that uses or benefits from a student employment program; protect the anonymity of complainants and set specific rules prohibiting any form of reprisal against students who complain about an irregular situation; forward copies of relevant documents from the time of hiring to all employees so that they are informed of their rights; and, lastly, pay full compensation to all students who have been the victims of discrimination as a result of the irregular implementation of the FSWEF.

Committee members, on behalf of students, we thank you for listening to us.

[English]

**The Chair:** *Merci.*

Monsieur D'Amours, seven minutes, please.

[Translation]

**Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours (Madawaska—Restigouche, Lib.):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Clermont or Ms. Archambault, could you clarify for us what the FSWEF is? Is it the Summer Career Placements Program?

**Mr. Pierre-Alexandre Clermont:** No, it's the Federal Student Work Experience Program, which promotes student employment.

**Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours:** Thank you. I'm going to look into that.

The question of dedicated transfers is important. We discussed this a bit during the last Parliament, the thirty-eighth. Dedicated transfers make it possible to allocate sums to the right place. This isn't a lack of trust, but it would make sure that the amounts are allocated to postsecondary education.

Mr. Beausoleil, you mentioned that 75% to 90% of books at the postsecondary level are in English. Has a study been conducted on this subject?

I'm going to go further. I'm from New Brunswick and a graduate of the Université de Moncton, which is a Francophone university. I would have said quite the contrary, that 25% of the books provided by the university are in English. I've had a fair bit of education: I hold two bachelor's degrees and two certificates, and I'm in the process of completing my master's degree. I have taken my courses with approximately 25% of books in English. I'm not saying that's good, because it's not always easy for a Francophone to study in English.

Are the figures of 75% to 90% based on research? Do they depend on the type of training? For example, is the shortage of books in French perhaps more of a problem in medicine than business administration or other fields? Can you give us any further details?

• (0910)

**Mr. Jean-Marc Beausoleil:** The documents you'll be receiving — we only have them in French here — describe studies and library inventories. Officially, 75% of books are in English. Seventy-five percent of the books of university libraries are in English. If you exclude obsolete books, you get approximately 80% or 90% of books in English for all sectors.

In the field of Roman studies, which isn't high technology, the books are in English. In political science, the books are also in English, particularly those from the European Union.

In our view, this situation is undesirable because it creates a handicap, which undermines equality of opportunity between French- and English-speaking Canadians. If we rely on the studies conducted in the United States, it creates an average comprehension handicap of 18%.

Studies have been conducted: 75% of books are in English. As regards French books in libraries, the situation is deteriorating at an alarming rate, as a result of which all books will be completely in English within 15 years.

I went to the aerospace school in Montreal, which is a vocational school. At first, people attending a vocational school don't have very good mastery of their mother tongue. In addition, all the books at that school are in English. The drop-out rate there is also astounding.

**Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours:** We're really talking about libraries.

**Mr. Jean-Marc Beausoleil:** It's the libraries, but if you take courses in Roman history, political science or medicine, you work with English books. Currently, 92% of medical books are English. This situation results in a lot of students dropping out.

In biology, 50% of students drop out of their courses. They don't just need to register for a course, they also need to learn a new language. That's not right. It's right to learn in English in order to work, but learning should be done in one's mother tongue. That would ensure equality of opportunity for English- and French-speaking Canadians.

If the English Canadian education system were in the same situation as that of the French Canadian system, there'd be an unbelievable drop-out rate and a sharp drop in marks. That's not normal. That's an incoherent situation.

**Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours:** I'd also like to hear your comments on dedicated funding transfers.

What measures do you recommend we take to reverse the situation?

• (0915)

**Mr. Jean-Marc Beausoleil:** As we said earlier, this is a national problem that's playing out against an educational backdrop. It's very important to understand this subtle distinction. This concerns official languages, employability, the standard of living of French-speaking Canadians, immigration and the integration of immigrants.

**Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours:** Does that mean that textbooks should be required to be in both official languages? I'm not saying the government should translate them, but I wonder whether

legislation should be passed to make these books available in both languages.

**Mr. Jean-Marc Beausoleil:** That would be normal. I don't live in India. I don't pay my taxes in that country either. In India, they may have serious problems of this kind, but we live here, and we have rights. Canada is founded on equality between English- and French-speaking Canadians. We've already chosen the path of the knowledge economy. Sixty years ago, this was a less serious issue than it is today; it's fundamentally important, particularly in a knowledge economy context. There has to be equality. That's what we're suggesting.

We've taken seven years to reach a consensus across Canada. We've described the situation. What we want is for a conference to be held, for the federal government and all Canadian ministries of education to attend it, for them to address the problem openly and for a series of measures to be developed to solve the problem quickly. That's feasible. There's no such thing as a problem without a solution.

This problem is currently being hidden under the table. Incidentally, the federal government invests billions of dollars in education annually. It's important to mention that fact. The Canadian Forces, for example, has a budget of \$2 billion for occupational training. People don't realize this, but the Canadian Forces is the biggest ministry of education in Canada. It trains doctors, lawyers, dentists and psychologists. They're all trained in English. That's not normal.

**Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours:** So in the brief that we're going to receive, and that will be translated in order to meet the committee's regulations, we'll find recommendations stating exactly what the government should do.

**Mr. Jean-Marc Beausoleil:** That's correct.

**Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours:** Thank you.

**Mr. Jean-Marc Beausoleil:** You'll also find a sample of studies on the number of books and so on.

**Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours:** I'll get back to that in my next question.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. D'Amours.

Mr. Lessard.

**Mr. Yves Lessard (Chambly—Borduas, BQ):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

First, I want to thank you for accepting our invitation.

Every time people come and testify about their experience, they make a considerable contribution to the work from which we submit recommendations to the House of Commons. They also make a considerable contribution to increasing the awareness of members of the government. I wanted to thank you for that.

First, I'm going to speak to Mr. Clermont and Ms. Archambault.

I'm sure both of you had to deliver all this in a fairly brief period of time. One of the things that struck me was the description of the conditions in which you're placed as students. The situation is such that this morning you're recommending to us, among other things, that a commission of inquiry be formed. Usually when there's talk of a commission of inquiry, we're talking about a fairly serious case.

As regards the impact of student employment and working conditions, I'm afraid we're letting something important pass. I'm also afraid that we're depriving government services of important resources.

I'd like you to expand a little on the subject. Some things are escaping me.

**Ms. Marie-Pier Archambault:** It must be understood that the FSWEF applies across Canada. We're virtually limited to the Chambly Canal. This situation is occurring virtually everywhere in Canada.

When I worked on the sites of other historic canals, I witnessed the same incidents. Wherever the FSWEF is used, the same inequality can be observed.

● (0920)

**Mr. Pierre-Alexandre Clermont:** Let's consider the scope of the irregular implementation of the FSWEF program. For example, there are approximately 9,000 learning assignments within the Canadian government across the country. At Parks Canada, we're talking about 1,000 assignments. In the absence of any program monitoring or audit, managers may be violating the policy in the cases of 1,000 student assignments without the students having any kind of recourse.

A document produced jointly by the Quebec legislation administration unit within the Parks Canada agency and the union contains a report describing the problem. According to that report, at a number of locations — if not all locations — there are complaints about the situation of students who are performing the same duties as other employees in classified positions, but at a fraction of the salary.

**Ms. Marie-Pier Archambault:** It should also be understood that, before the FSWEF started, regular employees occupied the positions. The number of classified positions was cut and the difference was made up with students.

**Mr. Yves Lessard:** Let's sum this up. You're given responsibilities that you originally weren't supposed to have. Your salary's kept at its initial level. Sometimes — you cited an example earlier — you have responsibilities that are associated with a wage of nearly \$10 more an hour, whereas you're not being paid that wage. Am I understanding this correctly?

**Ms. Marie-Pier Archambault:** Yes, the theory is different from the practice. In theory, there is a list of duties that students have to perform. However, that's impossible to put into practice in the field. It's impossible because the unit wouldn't be able to operate if students didn't take on other responsibilities, those of the position of an assistant lock operator.

**Mr. Yves Lessard:** Okay.

You said a lot about regulations and standards. You say they're not being complied with. You cited some examples on that point.

What do you expect from us? Usually, when regulations and standards aren't being complied with, you talk to your superiors. Has that been done?

**Mr. Pierre-Alexandre Clermont:** I've already approached my supervisors, at the Quebec legislation administration unit, and the Director General of Parks Canada, who answered me by letter. That letter, which was ultimately very unsatisfactory, reminded me that there was a difference between a classified position and a student assignment, even though I was complaining about the fact that students often found themselves in classified positions. He also referred me to a document concerning conditions of employment at Parks Canada. However, I hadn't received that document because, after I filed an information request with the director of the western Quebec unit, she instead sent me the Treasury Board document, which, of course, isn't the same document. There are of course differences between the two.

**Ms. Marie-Pier Archambault:** These officers rely on the existing documents, but, as I said, the theory differs a great deal from practice.

**Mr. Yves Lessard:** I'll come back to you later.

Now I want to speak to the representative of the support association for persons with disabilities, SPHERE-Québec. Ms. Moreau, earlier you gave me an example of labour market integration of persons with disabilities in the Montérégie region, in the horticulture industry.

Are you in contact with an existing program in the mountain area, Saint-Hilaire, Beloeil, McMasterville, Otterburn Park and so on? There's a labour market integration program for persons with disabilities there in a number of sectors. Are you aware of that?

**Ms. Nancy Moreau:** We serve the Montérégie region and we work in cooperation with the specialized employment services of those regions. There is a Montérégie specialized employment service office in Beloeil, I believe. It serves persons with disabilities and helps them enter the labour market. So we can receive requests from that area of Montérégie very regularly.

● (0925)

**Mr. Yves Lessard:** Does that area have the program you referred to earlier, the innovative special project? Is that the same program?

**Ms. Lyn Vincent:** The example we cited is one of a number of projects that may be supported by the individual measures of the Opportunities Fund for Persons with Disabilities. The people of that region have access to all the individual measures of the Opportunities Fund for Persons with Disabilities, which are managed by SPHERE-Québec. I'm the officer responsible for that region.

**Mr. Yves Lessard:** That was quite remarkable, because the employers were very proud of the work of those employees. Last year, I went there, and there were perhaps some 20 examples of situations in which employees with disabilities and employers came and testified. Each described their experience and what they had learned from it. It was quite amazing.

**Ms. Lyn Vincent:** You're no doubt referring to the press conference that was held in Montérégie to publicize the program for the public, the media, parents and persons with disabilities who weren't yet in contact.

As Nancy said earlier, a lot of persons with disabilities are currently at home and feel ready to enter the labour market, but don't really know where to turn. A program like the Opportunities Fund for Persons with Disabilities, which works for persons with disabilities, would really be an extraordinary thing for those people.

The horticulture project is a concrete example that shows it is currently possible in Quebec to tailor training for people who are looking for jobs. As you said so well, we respond to needs of employers who are currently facing a labour shortage. It's a winning formula.

[English]

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Lessard.

We're going to move along to Madame Savoie for seven minutes.

[Translation]

**Ms. Denise Savoie (Victoria, NDP):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

My first question concerns the dedicated transfer. As my party's critic for postsecondary education and training, I entirely agree. This is what we've been advocating for a number of years.

You mentioned an amount of \$4.9 billion. Are you referring to the budget cuts made in the 1990s? Is that an amount we should have today, if there hadn't been all those cuts, all those cutbacks over a number of years? Is that it? If not, does it represent another needs analysis?

**Mr. Philippe-Olivier Giroux:** As regards the \$4.9 billion, this amount was determined as follows. \$2.2 billion was cut in the mid-1990s from what at the time was called the Canada Health and Social Transfer. So that was \$2.2 billion, to which we added the indexing of system costs and an increase attributable to the fact that there are now more students in the university system. If you take these factors into account, the total is \$4.9 billion.

There's a consensus on that figure in Quebec, since, no more recently than last December, the Quebec minister of education, the Fédération québécoise des professeures et professeurs d'université, the university presidents table, the cegep administrators table, university and college students, as well as the Chamber of Commerce and the Conseil du patronat joined forces to say that the demand was \$4.9 billion for Quebec. So that would represent a contribution of approximately \$1.2 billion, taking into account the fact that Quebec traditionally receives 25% of transfers.

**Ms. Denise Savoie:** Okay, I think there's unanimous agreement on that figure, even elsewhere in Canada.

I've previously had discussions with representatives of the Fédération étudiante universitaire du Québec, the FEUQ. Do you think there could be, or there should be, conditions for this dedicated transfer? Otherwise, would that be encroaching on the provinces' jurisdiction? By way of conditions, I'm thinking, for example, of the quality and accessibility of education, to ensure a certain degree of accountability with regard to those sums of money.

● (0930)

**Mr. Philippe-Olivier Giroux:** In your view, this is a transfer that absolutely must not entail any conditions. The provinces make various choices regarding accessibility. Quebec, for example, has decided to maintain quite low tuition fees. The choices of each of the provinces must be respected. The use of this transfer for postsecondary education must entirely remain the jurisdiction of the provinces.

**Ms. Denise Savoie:** All right, thank you.

Mr. Beausoleil, when we met briefly a few months ago, I believe we spoke about teaching materials in French. At National Defence, for example, I myself have observed that many young Quebecers registering for mandatory courses had to use material drafted in English only and that, as a result, in many cases, they failed the exam.

When you referred to course material, you meant the teaching material necessary for the courses in the education system, didn't you?

**Mr. Jean-Marc Beausoleil:** I'm not sure I understand your question.

**Ms. Denise Savoie:** Are we talking about teaching materials intended for courses offered to Francophones?

**Mr. Jean-Marc Beausoleil:** Yes.

**Ms. Denise Savoie:** At National Defence, for example.

**Mr. Jean-Marc Beausoleil:** Libraries are still central to the transmission of knowledge. You can't disregard that fact. If each institution has a 100,000-book library, it's because that's a necessity. We're talking about the translation of teaching material and books into French, but we also have to talk about the translation of material in the libraries. That goes without saying.

**Ms. Denise Savoie:** To get back to the problem you raised, I'd like to know whether, in your view, it exists solely at Parks Canada. Have you checked this?

**Ms. Marie-Pier Archambault:** I know someone who, before working at the canal, had the same experience at Customs and Excise Canada, as part of the FSWEF.

**Ms. Denise Savoie:** Were those positions for students or regular positions filled by students?

**Mr. Pierre-Alexandre Clermont:** In fact, under the cover of a student assignment, they're filling classified positions. To add to my colleague's remarks, I'd say that all the agencies may have problems with implementation of the FSWEF, since there's no monitoring. For example, I heard that, at Statistics Canada, they hadn't yet paid students for hours worked this past summer.

In that case as well, they can only complain, but if the administration doesn't pay them, they won't have any recourse. They can't even ask the Public Service Commission to investigate the situation.

**Ms. Denise Savoie:** I'm going to set aside the wage issue for the moment.

You see the fact that students are filling classified positions as a problem. It seems to me that may be a positive experience for them.

● (0935)

**Mr. Pierre-Alexandre Clermont:** Of course, but there is a discriminatory factor. For example, you only need a high school diploma to be a lock operator. Employees who have merely completed their fifth year of high school occupy a classified position and earn practically \$20 an hour, whereas we're paid \$8.95 an hour for the same work because we're students.

**Ms. Marie-Pier Archambault:** We don't get the same benefits either.

**Ms. Denise Savoie:** Thank you.

[English]

**The Chair:** Thank you, Madame Savoie.

I have some other questions I'd like to ask Madame Moreau in terms of the opportunities fund. As we've travelled—we have just come from the east—the importance of the fund has been mentioned at each stop along the way. I'd like you to elaborate a little bit more on some of the projects you're involved in.

I understand the fund is \$30 million across the country. Is that correct? As well, what kinds of funds flow to Quebec specifically, and to your organization? Maybe you could elaborate on some of the programs you're involved in.

[Translation]

**Ms. Nancy Moreau:** I hope I clearly understood the question in English. I'll try to answer you, but correct me if I'm wrong.

SPHERE-Québec is an organization that offers its services in Quebec. It is mandated by the Department of Human Resources and Social Development Canada to manage, across Quebec, the portion of the envelope for the Opportunities Fund for Persons with Disabilities that is allocated to that province. The Opportunities Fund is a Canadian program. Is that what you asked me?

[English]

**The Chair:** No, it wasn't, but I'll try again.

I understood all that. I understood how important the opportunities fund is; as I said, it has been mentioned in other provinces we've been in. I just wanted to know specifically if \$30 million was the correct amount of the fund nationally, and then how much your organization received. You mentioned some programs, but I was more curious about the types of different programs that you deliver here in the province.

[Translation]

**Ms. Nancy Moreau:** SPHERE-Québec receives an average of \$3.5 or \$4 million annually for persons with disabilities in Quebec. Those amounts are clearly inadequate. Even though they enable us to help between 500 and 700 persons with disabilities each year, there are other needs that must be met.

The Opportunities Fund supplements the provincial programs. There are already programs of this kind in Quebec. To avoid any overlap, we strive, in as flexible a manner as possible, to meet individual needs, to fill certain gaps. The service offered varies with

each region, the needs of each person, the availability of funding in Quebec and that of our own funds.

[English]

**The Chair:** Could you elaborate a bit more? You talked about a few examples previously, but could you give me a few more examples of the services that are delivered—maybe of the variety of different programs you offer?

[Translation]

**Ms. Nancy Moreau:** These are individual measures. So we respond to the needs of one person at a time. For example, we may pay interpretation costs during a training period for one deaf person who is entering a job at a plant. This may involve team meetings or meetings during which that person's supervisor explains instructions. We can also pay the costs to build a ramp enabling a person in a wheelchair to access the building where he or she will work.

I'd like to turn the floor over to Ms. Vincent, who works in the field. She can give you concrete examples of what we can do.

● (0940)

**Ms. Lyn Vincent:** There are different components. Obviously, we also help people enter the labour market. So it's possible for us to pay a portion of their salary, until they can enter the market and develop their employability in the context of their job. As Nancy said, we can adapt workstations because we work with persons with disabilities and we serve people with all kinds of disabilities. People who have functional physical limitations need specific adaptations to their workstations or access to their place of work. As for persons living with a mental disability, they need to be accompanied in the work places to assist them in learning their duties. What is difficult for an employer is to take in one person and to have to increase necessary supervision time for another employee by a factor of 10 or 15. This is the business world, and employers have no time to waste. We have to accommodate them and be able to provide these employers with assistance that will enable them to open their doors and give this experience a try, and that leads to extraordinary job retention situations.

We can also take part in skills development. We said earlier that the persons with disabilities that we work with are far removed from the labour market. They haven't received employment insurance in three years. That's a standard these days. In 2006, even a person without disabilities looking for work after being unemployed for three or more years is suffering from a major handicap.

We can help these people by finding them remedial training that will enable them to enter the labour market. Skills development is also an area we're trying to focus on and invest in. Special training is a path we think is very promising because people are trained and can have access to the regular labour market.

[English]

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

Next is Mr. D'Amours. You have five minutes, please.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'm going back to the question of dedicated transfers. I'm going to speak to Mr. Giroux and Mr. Ndobu.

I'd like to understand a minor distinction with regard to the provinces' obligation. You want transfers to be dedicated, and that's one thing, but you don't want any obligations imposed on the provinces. Are we in fact talking about the social transfer divided in two, that is to say the social portion on the one hand and postsecondary education on the other? If that's in fact what you mean, what effect would not imposing obligations on the provinces have? In fact, there is an obligation because amounts must be allocated specifically to postsecondary education. Do you mean that the provincial governments wouldn't be required to allocate the amounts in such and such a way?

**Mr. Philippe-Olivier Giroux:** In fact, what we mean is that the money should go to the provinces so that they can manage it in accordance with their priorities. In the rest of Canada, tuition fees are higher than in Quebec. What does that cause? To help students, the government will put in place programs like the Canada Student Loan Program or the Canada Education Savings Grant. Consequently, the provinces that charge high tuition fees will benefit much more from those programs than provinces that choose to maintain lower tuition fees.

The provinces that choose to use resources to guarantee accessibility will be put at a disadvantage because those that receive the most money from those programs will be, on the contrary, the ones that have decided to reduce accessibility by charging high fees. We would like the provinces to be able to use the amounts as they see fit.

Canada has a system for providing financial assistance for education which has been aware of the actual situation in the field since the 1960s. That system is much more honed than a program such as the Canadian Millennium Scholarship Foundation, which was established about 10 years ago. We think Quebec organizations are much more capable of managing the money and distributing it to students in a fair and efficient manner.

We want the money to be transferred to the provinces through a dedicated transfer. I stated the benefits of that transfer earlier. It also clearly shows the federal contribution and that of the province. We can know which level is doing its work in the education field and which one is not. Consequently, the provinces can use the funds in the way they consider most effective for their education sector.

• (0945)

**Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours:** Okay. That helps me. You're right, tuition costs are much higher in other provinces. In New Brunswick, for example, annual tuition fees for students at the bachelor's level vary between \$5,200 and \$5,400. In Quebec, they're much lower than those amounts.

This is a major challenge for the students of a number of regions, particularly for minority Francophone students. They often need to travel, which results in additional costs. Mr. Ndobu was telling me earlier that he was a graduate of the University of Moncton. I'm

extremely proud to have you here. This is proof that it's a highly recognized institution.

Once the transfers are made, we wind up in a debate that's hard to win. Money is indeed transferred, but, ultimately, what amount should actually be allocated to the future of our youth? That's currently very hard to determine. A dedicated transfer, as you said, would show who's doing his job and who isn't. The Canadian public wants to be able to blame, as it were, the person who's not doing his or her job well.

**Mr. Philippe-Olivier Giroux:** Absolutely. As regards dedicated transfers, that's one thing that has previously been done in the past. The former Canada Health and Social Transfer was split in two: one transfer for health and the other for social programs. That clarifies the federal government's contribution to the health sector. We think we should adopt this model for postsecondary education.

**Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours:** Thank you very much.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Madame Bonsant is next, for five minutes.

[*Translation*]

**Ms. France Bonsant (Compton—Stanstead, BQ):** Good morning. I'm going to speak to Ms. Moreau.

In my riding, there are persons with mental disabilities who have entered the job market. I went to visit them, and things aren't easy for them. In the Eastern Townships, there is a problem with housing adapted to certain disabilities. Does your program help local organizations gain access to financial assistance for housing and transportation? As you said, a number of persons with disabilities live in rural areas. My riding comprises 44 municipalities, and the largest has 6,700 inhabitants. A lot of people live outside of it and have no means of transportation.

Do you have money to help these people make their housing accessible, which would avoid having to transport them morning and evening?

**Ms. Nancy Moreau:** We focus our efforts more particularly on employment. However, our clientele is often faced with these types of problems, which cannot be dissociated from employment. If a person is unable to find housing before starting to work, we try to find relief housing enabling him or her to access a job or avoid losing an employment opportunity. The program does not enable us to intervene over the long term or in housing.

In cooperation with the employment advisors of the specialized labour services, we try to find temporary solutions, until the person can find a more permanent solution. We offer temporary assistance to cover housing costs so that the person has the time to find a new foster family or move. We can also pay transportation expenses. That's a temporary solution that leaves people the time to find a car pool arrangement or appropriate means of transportation, to obtain a driver's licence or move.

Unfortunately, we look for temporary solutions to prevent people from losing job opportunities. In cooperation with their caseworkers, the people often spend weeks, even months, looking for a job. When the opportunity arises, we make it so that they at least don't lose that opportunity. We try to find temporary solutions.

• (0950)

**Ms. France Bonsant:** This is a question that some taxpayers with disabilities have asked me. In a small municipality that is a central town, people live outside the area. A person with mental disabilities doesn't have a driver's licence. We therefore have to find those people places that are close to their work. Everything related to housing has been cut by the federal government since the 1990s. Whether it's one government or another, the situation is the same everywhere.

I was wondering whether you had any money to assist these people in finding new housing, not necessarily in mansions, but in places nearer their work. You're telling me you don't do that.

**Ms. Nancy Moreau:** No, we deal specifically with employment-related problems. However, as I was saying, that's an comprehensive area. The problems that persons with disabilities have can't be viewed separately; they're all interrelated. That's why we work with the partners in the health systems and rehabilitation centres to try to find comprehensive solutions.

We talk to each other; we don't work alone. That's our strength, because we have few resources, very little money, and we focus specifically on employment. Since everyone's talking to each other, we manage to find solutions that don't solve all the problems, as you said, but that at least make it possible to prevent people from losing certain job opportunities.

**Ms. France Bonsant:** In view of the labour shortage, it has to be understood that it's not because you have a disability that you can't work. I have a granddaughter who's at cegep and is taking hyperbaric oxygen therapy treatment. She's made progress. Everything's in place, but she's unable to speak.

I'm going back to Mr. Giroux of the Fédération étudiante universitaire du Québec. I don't know whether you heard about the BLEU, Bureaux de liaison entreprises-universités, that they're trying to set up here, in Sherbrooke, with the know-how and knowledge we have in Sherbrooke, together with Bishop's University, the two cegeps and the University of Sherbrooke.

Have the University of Sherbrooke or your association agreed with certain businesses to...? If the federal government doesn't transfer the money related to the fiscal imbalance we're always hearing about, couldn't you enter into agreements with certain research and development businesses to develop textiles, plastics, etc.? Couldn't you have created a kind of partnership with these companies and students?

**Mr. Philippe-Olivier Giroux:** To obtain additional money, I assume?

**Ms. France Bonsant:** To obtain money and knowledge. There are coops in engineering, but that opportunity shouldn't be afforded just in engineering. In my opinion, all college and university institutions should offer training divided equally between work and courses.

I was wondering whether coop programs wouldn't be an option for you. During that time, the student is paid and acquires experience. It's a mix of two things: work and courses. Have you tried that — doing both — with certain businesses?

**Mr. Philippe-Olivier Giroux:** We represent students who conduct research, students at the master's and doctoral level.

I'd like us to have the leeway to take a position on whether universities can approach businesses for this kind of partnership. I'll give you an example.

If the University of Sherbrooke wants to agree with four businesses to give students the opportunity to conduct research projects with them, or if those businesses want to fund research projects at the university, we'd be in favour of that.

However, that all has to be strictly overseen. First, students must receive fair compensation. They mustn't be used as cheap labour, to conduct research instead of the business.

Second, the intellectual property rights inherent in the research must be clearly determined. If the students discover something in the course of their research, they must be able to be recognized and, subsequently, receive royalties resulting from that discovery. We think that must be established.

Lastly, the cooperation of one business with a university must not influence the university syllabus. For example, we wouldn't want universities to start developing programs specifically for businesses, because, when the economic sector of those businesses collapses, the universities will be stuck with programs that are no longer necessarily needed.

**Ms. France Bonsant:** That's not all. A number of university students have spoken to me about the federal-provincial transfer for tuition fees. That transfer is a good idea, as you said earlier. However, we shouldn't be funding health without funding plastics research, or be funding certain fields at the expense of others. These students have told me they agreed with the federal transfer, but that Quebec should manage its own investment areas; otherwise certain departments would be targeted at the expense of others. These students clearly told me that matters absolutely should not come to that.

I know that health is in fashion these days, but there are other things than health: there's engineering, social development, agriculture. I'd like to know your views on the subject: targeting research at the expense of other areas.

• (0955)

**Mr. Philippe-Olivier Giroux:** In research, to a certain extent, you have to rely on specific strengths and develop strategic areas. In economic terms, that's what has the best chance of paying dividends.

However, it's essential to fund a very broad range of research, including basic research in the social sciences and humanities, which the private sector tends to underfund, or not fund at all. Why? Because basic research often produces results after 20 or 30 years.

Albert Einstein's theory of relativity is an example I love. In the 1950s, it was pure theory. It was practically an intellectual toy. However, now it enables us to achieve accuracy with a GPS to within 15 meters instead of 15 kilometers. That's why it's very important to continue investing in these areas. It's mainly the federal government's responsibility to invest in the humanities and in basic research, since the private sector isn't doing it.

[English]

**The Chair:** Thank you, Madame Bonsant.

We're almost out of time today. We're going to 10 o'clock, but I'm going to give one last round to Madame Savoie. You have five minutes.

[Translation]

**Ms. Denise Savoie:** Thank you.

You've begun to address a subject that is a major concern of mine. For the past 12 years or so, we've tended to privatize basic research. The emphasis has been placed on research that pays, not basic research that we need, as you just mentioned.

As regards the dedicated transfer, I wanted to ensure that, in your mind, it was only for postsecondary education, and that increased research funding was separate.

**Mr. Philippe-Olivier Giroux:** That's correct. What's called core funding for universities in fact represents their operating budget. Research is funded by other means. In the first rank are the following three agencies: the Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada, the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada and the Canadian Institutes of Health Research.

**Ms. Denise Savoie:** To get back to the humanities, I know that research in that field is funded less than in the sciences and engineering. The amounts allocated to research in the humanities are not representative of the number of students who study in that field.

Are there any statistics or facts that you could give us on the subject?

**Mr. Philippe-Olivier Giroux:** I can't give you any off hand. However, I can confirm that humanities research has long been funded to a lesser degree than research in health or the natural sciences and engineering.

For example, in the spring budget, the only one of the three funds that underwent budget cuts was that of the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council. And yet it's really very important to fund that type of research adequately. We must assess the potential social consequences of every technological innovation introduced into society. You need only think of the entire ethical aspect that goes with pharmaceutical research and health research. It's very important that this type of research evolve along with technological and health research. If you're interested in this matter, I can probably find statistics on the subject.

● (1000)

**Ms. Denise Savoie:** Thank you very much.

[English]

**The Chair:** I'd like to thank all the witnesses for being here today. I want to thank my colleagues, as well as the witnesses, for being patient with my French.

These are pretty important discussions we're having. We believe employability is a huge issue, and as you've all pointed out in your own way, more needs to be done in this country.

We want to thank you all once again for being here and for taking time out of your busy schedules.

The meeting is adjourned.

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