

Tuition hikes: Government chooses path that could ruin Quebec's English universities

Montreal – Wednesday, December 13, 2023 – The Quebec Community Groups Network is bitterly disappointed that the Legault government appears to be continuing along a path that could bring ruin to Quebec's three English universities.

News reports suggest the government has determined its final position on tuition increases for out-of-province students. Measures would include a 33 per cent tuition increase for undergraduate students coming to Quebec from other Canadian provinces; an impossible demand to “francicize” 80 per cent of **all** out-of-province students, including international students, or face penalties; as well as a transfer of additional revenues – if there are any – to the French-language university sector. “These are clear existential threats to the three universities that attract the greatest number of students from outside Quebec: McGill, Concordia and Bishop’s,” said Ludvig.

“If a government were trying to devise a plan to starve Quebec’s English-language universities out of existence, it would look a lot like this,” Ludvig said.

Bishop’s may be spared the worst. Its small anglophone student body is not seen as a threat to French in Sherbrooke and it may be exempt from these measures.

McGill University has already responded vehemently, pointing out how impossible it would be to instruct 80 per cent of out-of-province students in French. Of the university’s 12,000 international students, about 2,000 are French.

“McGill is a jewel in Quebec’s crown – one of the world’s leading universities and consistently the best in Canada,” Ludvig commented. “Instead of celebrating it and urging it on to greater success, the Legault government wants to punish it – all in the name of protecting and promoting the French language against what it perceives to be a threat in downtown Montreal.”

“The government has produced no evidence whatsoever that the presence of McGill and Concordia students in the downtown core, contributes to the anglicization of the metropolis,” commented Sylvia Martin-Laforge, director general of the QCGN. “But when Premier François Legault and Language Minister Jean-François Roberge complain about hearing too much English on the streets of Montreal, that is apparently enough to bring about a policy that could kill or severely injure several fine institutions.

“What are they thinking?”

Already, mere mention of the government’s intentions over the last couple of months has prompted at least one credit-rating agency to consider downgrading McGill’s and Concordia’s credit ratings, driven both universities to institute immediate hiring freezes and pushed Concordia to announce drastic budget cuts.

The universities knew they would be flattened by this program even before international students were brought into the francization mix. The Canadian university market is crowded and competitive. At \$12,000 for undergrad tuition for students from other provinces, McGill, Concordia, and Bishop’s all warn they will be priced out of the market.

“When this proposal was first floated in October, it was met with enormous pushback from a variety of sectors, including all francophone universities outside of the Université de Québec system,” said Martin-Laforge. “Business leaders, mayors, student groups and others joined in to denounce it. Quebec’s move was noted internationally, by influential organizations such as London-based Times Higher Education, as well as by media in the rest of Canada and the United States.”

“We are more than disheartened. We are angry,” Ludvig said. “We worry about the damage this will do to all of Quebec – not just the devastating blow it will deliver to Montreal. We fear for the future of our province.”

The Quebec Community Groups Network (www.qcgn.ca) is a not-for-profit organization bringing together English-language community organizations and individuals across Quebec. Its mission is to identify, explore, and address strategic issues affecting the development and vitality of English-speaking Quebec and to encourage dialogue and collaboration.

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