



**BRIEF TO THE STANDING COMMITTEE ON OFFICIAL  
LANGUAGES**

**The Importance of the University Research  
Ecosystem for Quebec's English-Speaking Official  
Language Minority Community**

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## Purpose of Brief

This brief calls for the Government of Canada to increase funding for research on Quebec's English-speaking official language minority community (OLMC) and for the ecosystem in minority-language post-secondary institutions that is required for research production. The brief addresses the situation and needs, and proposes a solution.

## Situation

### Research needs of Both OLMCs

The federal government defines OLMCs in Canada as English speakers in Quebec and Francophones outside Quebec. The federal *Official Languages Act* calls on the government to support OLMC vitality.

Research is essential for actors and stakeholders to make evidence-based decisions that ensure OLMC vitality. The Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages recognized this in its 2006 report "A Sharper View"

The vitality of a community emerges from the assumption that it takes charge of its own development. Must not this empowerment on the part of OLMCs be based on better knowledge of themselves, in light of the realities of their situation (diagnosis) and the challenges they face (strategic planning)?<sup>1</sup>

The document lays out recommendations and plans for an improved OLMC research strategy including calling on governments "to provide financial support for initiatives undertaken by [researchers and community groups] relative to research and the development of capacities."<sup>2</sup>

Since then, others have pointed out the importance of research on OLMCs. For instance, in 2017, the Canadian Institutes of Health Research issued their *Report on Consultations with Official Language Minority Communities*. It made many points about research on health as it relates to OLMCs, including:

#### Research capacity/quality

- "Students and young researchers need appropriate professional training and funding in order to increase the capacity for research on OLMCs."
- There is a need to invest in "sustainable infrastructure and structures, such as research centres, to support small universities and to ensure the sustainability and retention of good researchers in the field of OLMCs."
- There is a "need to invest in networking among communities of researchers across Canada and research networks in order to combat the lack of information on the

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<sup>1</sup> Canada, Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages, 2006, 6.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 57.

health status of OLMCs and to learn more about the research funding programs available.”<sup>3</sup>

Scholarly research is all the more important because it helps to combat prejudice and misinformation that particularly affects minorities and vulnerable groups.

## [Research Needs of English-Speaking Communities](#)

### **Context**

There have been English-speaking communities in the province for over two hundred and sixty years. Today, there are about a million Quebecers whose first official language is English. This population is organized into diverse communities that make important social, economic, and cultural contributions to Quebec and Canada. The population is largely bilingual, well integrated in Quebec, and committed to linguistic duality and bridging solitudes.

Nonetheless, research shows that Quebec’s English-speaking communities face significant challenges to their vitality. A key area of vulnerability is poverty,<sup>4</sup> which is a particular concern for English-speaking Black communities and other visible minority communities.<sup>5</sup> Related challenges include growing unemployment rates<sup>6</sup> and high youth outmigration.<sup>7</sup> Research has also highlighted barriers in access to services for groups such as artists<sup>8</sup> and seniors.<sup>9</sup> Finally, and despite high rates of bilingualism within the communities, English-speaking Quebecers have also long been perceived as a threat to the long-term vitality of the Francophone majority in Quebec, leading to social tension.

Research-based evidence is required to nuance the discourse, foster better intercultural relations, and support the vitality of this official language minority.

### ***Research needs of English-speaking communities as expressed by the QCGN***

The Quebec Community Groups Network (QCGN) is currently managing a Strategic Growth Plan for English-speaking Quebec. This process generated four community roundtables, “which convene stakeholders to build consensus on common challenges facing our community.”<sup>10</sup> One of these is a data roundtable, which argues that adequate data and research on English-speaking Quebec:

- Provides ongoing sensitization to the lived realities of English-speaking communities; and
- Leads to desired policy or funding shifts.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Canadian Institutes of Health Research, 2017.

<sup>4</sup> Nadine Ciamarra et al., 2021, “Challenges Around Resources.”

<sup>5</sup> Black Community Resource Centre, 2021.

<sup>6</sup> Provincial Employment Roundtable, 2022.

<sup>7</sup> Nadine Ciamarra et al., 2021, “Outmigration.”

<sup>8</sup> Tracy Zhang, 2012.

<sup>9</sup> Quebec Community Groups Network, 2014.

<sup>10</sup> Quebec Community Groups Network, 2022a.

<sup>11</sup> Quebec Community Groups Network. 2022b.

Thus, according to the QCGN, which is the English-speaking OLMC's chief interlocutor with the federal government, access to data and research are essential components of the OLMC's development. To that end, the QCGN recently recommended that in the Action Plan, the federal government "invest in university-based research creation and dissemination to ensure a shared, credible, and up-to-date evidence base on English-speaking Quebec."<sup>12</sup>

## The Concept of "Research Ecosystems"

More and more, scholars are using the term "ecosystem" to describe the large and complex environments needed to produce research.

While reviewing the growing literature on this topic is beyond the scope of the present brief, a few salient points are mentioned below.

### Definition

The university research ecosystem has been described as "a community of researchers which interacts with one another, their environment and other stakeholders interested in their respective areas of research in such a way that knowledge is transferred between them and system-level processes emerge."<sup>13</sup>

### Elements of University Research Ecosystems

Research indicates that university research ecosystems include these **stakeholders**:

- Faculty
- Research associates
- Funding agencies
- Governments
- Industry
- External institutes
- Graduate students<sup>14</sup>

To this list, I would add *community partners*, which often co-create knowledge and provide direction to university-based research.

University research ecosystems also include these **processes**:

- Training and education: research seminars, summer schools
- Research dissemination events: conferences, workshops, forums, online videos
- Publications
- Library systems<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Quebec Community Groups Network. 2022c.

<sup>13</sup> Satyendra C. Pandey and Pinaki Nandan Pattnaik, 2015, 173.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 174.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 175.

And finally, these ecosystems include **infrastructures** including external agencies and offices and, of course, the universities themselves.

### Sustainability

A research ecosystem's stakeholders and processes may change. If it is a sustainable ecosystem, it will survive and thrive despite the changes. Elements fostering such sustainability include a strong research culture, effective knowledge management, and a nurturing, open environment.<sup>16</sup>

### Inclusiveness

Some research ecosystems are inequitable. For instance, scholars have found that “culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) populations” are under-represented in health research in Australia.<sup>17</sup> For a more *equitable research ecosystem* within this context, the scholars addressing the Australian situation recommended that the following elements be available.

- *Policy* with “aspirational targets” that are implemented
- *Funding* that targets diverse populations and covers translation costs as needed, and that otherwise fosters inclusion
- *Institutions* whose “research portfolios are matching the people and needs of their context”
- *Researchers* who receive training to obtain “the skills, knowledge, and sensitivities involved in research engaging diverse populations”

In my view, these elements should be present in all university research ecosystems to ensure inclusion of minority and diverse populations, including research ecosystems focused on Canada's OLMCs.

## **Ecosystems of Research on Canada's OLMCs**

Describing the entire ecosystems of research on Canada's OLMCs is beyond the scope of this short brief, but some relevant points are sketched out below.

### Francophone OLMCs

#### ***A Large and Complex University Research Ecosystem***

There is a large and complex research ecosystem devoted to the topic of Francophone OLMCs.

Its elements include a network of stakeholders with a strong research culture, commitment at the higher education level, and research-oriented structures and individuals.

This ecosystem includes:

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 176-178.

<sup>17</sup> Kate Murray et al., 835.

- **Approximately 13 research centres** on Francophone OLMCs,<sup>18</sup> for instance, the *Centre d'études franco-canadiennes de l'Ouest* at the Université de St. Boniface in Manitoba.<sup>19</sup>
  - It is worth highlighting the role of the **Canadian Institute for Research on Linguistic Minorities (CIRLM)**. It was established in 2002 through the creation of a \$10M endowment by the federal government. In its 2020-2021 annual report, the CIRLM indicated total revenues of \$1,268,147, including an investment income of \$464,541, and a realized gain on sale of investments of \$332,728.<sup>20</sup> Although committed to serving all OLMCs in Canada, the CIRLM is based at the Université de Moncton, which has relatively little expertise on English-speaking Quebec, and deals mainly with Francophone OLMCs. The CIRLM provided \$25,000 in annual funds (roughly 2% of its total annual revenue) to QUESCREN until March 30, 2024, when funding ceased.
- **Approximately 24 research chairs** on the topic of Francophone OLMCs<sup>21</sup> and a program at the University of Ottawa called **Chaires de recherche sur le monde francophone**.<sup>22</sup> These research chairs focus on Francophone OLMCs and beyond. For instance, there is a *Chaire de recherche de l'Université d'Ottawa et de l'Institut du Savoir Montfort sur la santé des francophones de l'Ontario*.
- **A Collège des chaires de recherche sur le monde francophone**, which “contribue à créer un environnement favorable à une expérience éducative et scientifique au service d'une communauté francophone multiculturelle.” Both the program and the Collège are located at the University of Ottawa.<sup>23</sup>
- **Researcher networks**, including:
  - A network of Associate Researchers organized by the Canadian Institute for Research on Linguistic Minorities (CIRLM).<sup>24</sup> The CIRLM also lists researchers in the field.<sup>25</sup>
  - The *Réseau de recherche sur la francophonie canadienne (RRF)*, which brings together researchers focused on Francophones in Canada. The Association des collèges et universités de la francophonie canadienne (ACUFC) houses an RRF coordinating committee.
  - Acfas, which has a commitment to Francophones outside Quebec.

## Challenges

That said, research on Francophone OLMCs faces challenges. These include issues related to the predominance of English rather than French in academic scholarship, and the fact

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<sup>18</sup> To our knowledge, a definitive list does not exist. Source of the number provided here: Sylvain St-Onge (for the CIRLM), 2022. Thanks to the CIRLM for sharing this document.

<sup>19</sup> Centre d'études franco-canadiennes de l'Ouest, 2022.

<sup>20</sup> Canadian Institute for Research on Linguistic Minorities (CIRLM), 2021, 23.

<sup>21</sup> Sylvain St-Onge, 2022.

<sup>22</sup> University of Ottawa, 2022.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Canadian Institute for Research on Linguistic Minorities (CIRLM), 2022a.

<sup>25</sup> Canadian Institute for Research on Linguistic Minorities (CIRLM), 2022b.

that many scholars studying Francophone OLMCs work in small universities with relatively fewer networking opportunities. These and many other challenges are outlined in a recent document prepared by Acfas.<sup>26</sup>

### English-Speaking OLMCs

#### *A Small University Research Ecosystem*

Research on English-speaking Quebec has a different history and faces different challenges than does research on Francophone OLMCs.

For one thing, **the whole university sector is underfunded in Quebec**. What is more, **there is a misconception that Quebec’s English-language universities receive more provincial government funding than do the French-language ones.**<sup>27</sup> This misconception unfortunately represents an obstacle to fruitful discussion of the funding issue.

For another thing, **supporting research on English-speaking Quebec has been less central to the mandates of the English-language university sector in Quebec than for its counterpart universities serving Francophone OLMCs.** In a 2021 essay, Brendan O'Donnell describes how, during the 1980s, there was some interest on the part of Quebec’s three English-language universities—Bishop’s, McGill, and Concordia—in the form of courses taught and research initiatives focused on the topic, but, by the late 1990s, this dwindled so that courses and other initiatives were dropped. O'Donnell identifies this as a problem, and calls for more research on English-speaking Quebec and more courses to be taught in these universities on the subject.<sup>28</sup> The work of QUESCREN has led to some recent growth in research capacity on the topic, but a new article by QUESCREN staff encourages English-language universities to do more.<sup>29</sup>

**Furthermore, in contrast to the situation for Francophone OLMCs, there are currently no Research Chairs on English-speaking Quebec.**

Also in contrast to the situation for research on Francophone OLMCs, **there exists only one university-based research body devoted to the topic of English-speaking Quebec. It is the Quebec English-Speaking Communities Research Network (QUESCREN),** described below.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Sylvain St-Onge et al., 2021.

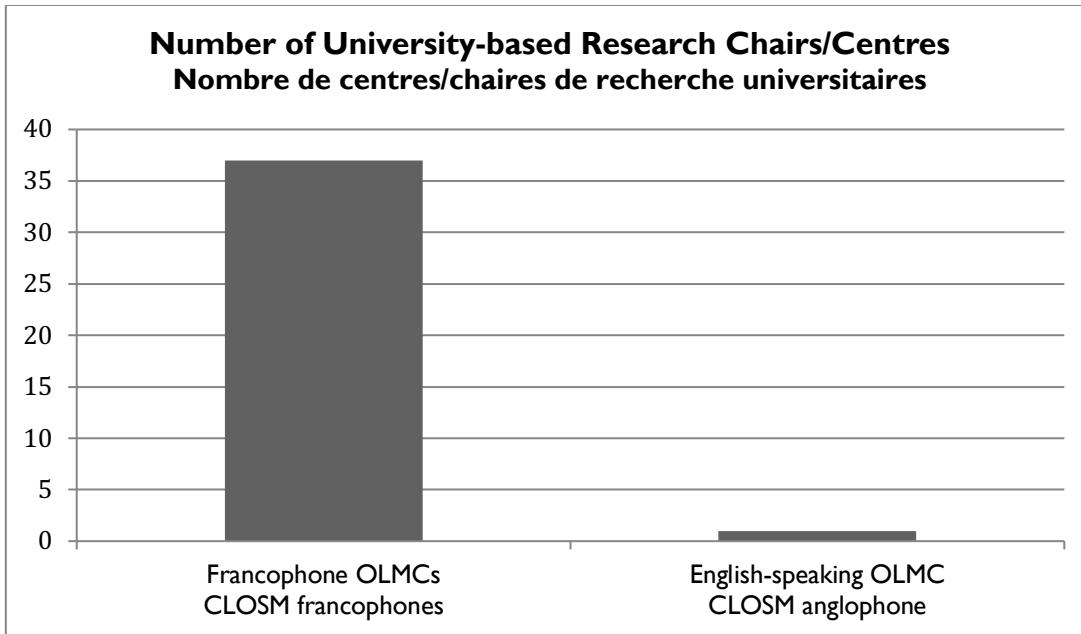
<sup>27</sup> Shannon Bell and Patrick Donovan, 2024.

<sup>28</sup> Brendan O'Donnell, 2021.

<sup>29</sup> Lorraine O'Donnell and Patrick Donovan, 2023.

<sup>30</sup> Note that there are research units focused on aspects of English-speaking Quebec, including the Research and Evaluation Program of Dialogue McGill, centred on access and delivery of health and social services, and Eastern Townships Resource Centre, the archives of which concentrate mainly on the region’s English-speaking communities. See [dialoguemcgill.ca](http://dialoguemcgill.ca) and [ETRC.ca](http://ETRC.ca).





### *The Role of QUESCREN*

#### About

Housed at Concordia University in Montreal, QUESCREN was launched in 2009. It is a collaborative network of researchers, stakeholders, and educational and other institutions that improves understanding of Quebec's English-speaking communities and promotes their vitality. Its mission is to provide opportunities to promote the understanding and vitality of Quebec's English-language minority communities through research, knowledge mobilization, training, networking, and outreach.

Two Concordia University faculty members, Drs. Chedly Belkhodja and Brian Lewis, direct QUESCREN. The unit currently has two full-time and six part-time staff members, including two senior Research Advisors (Drs. Lorraine O'Donnell and Patrick Donovan).

#### Activities

- Mobilizing knowledge: events, bibliography, newsletter, event videos, social media
- Researching and publishing
- Networking the English-language education sector through our Inter-Level Educational Table
- Developing and supporting our network of **79 researcher-members** from colleges, universities, and other entities in Quebec, Canada, and beyond
- Managing multi-partner community-based research and development projects
- Training students

## Funding

The Secrétariat aux relations avec les Québécois d'expression anglaise (SRQEA) of the government of Quebec, and Canadian Heritage provide ongoing funding for QUESCREN. Concordia University supports QUESCREN with in-kind provision of university spaces and services. In addition, QUESCREN obtains occasional project funds from partners. Most of QUESCREN's funding comes from the SRQEA, whose long-term existence may be less certain than that of our other funders given that it is not a ministry. **Canadian Heritage provides approximately \$130,000 per year in a support fund for QUESCREN** via an agreement with the Concordia University Foundation.

## Challenges

QUESCREN faces a number of challenges. Given that QUESCREN is the sole academic entity devoted to research on English-speaking Quebec, its challenges are also those of the entire research sector related to English-speaking Quebec.

QUESCREN's challenges include:

- **Limited funding.** As mentioned, QUESCREN has not only a central, but a unique role in the English-speaking Quebec research ecosystem. QUESCREN is the *only* university-based entity devoted to research on English-speaking Quebec. QUESCREN lacks capacity to conduct and mobilize knowledge to the degree that Quebec's English-speaking communities deserve and need.
  - For instance, at the meetings of the Inter-Level Educational Table (ILET), a committee QUESCREN convenes, members repeatedly state the need for more research on the continuum of Quebec's English-language educational offer. QUESCREN staff has to reply that they lack capacity to do more research given existing resources.
- **Annual (vs. continuing) funding.** QUESCREN's revenues are generated through grants that are not guaranteed. This includes the annual program funding that Canadian Heritage provides, which is always lower than the amounts needed and requested. In comparison, as mentioned, the federal government provided the CIRLM with a \$10M endowment that generates several hundred thousands of dollars per year, ensuring the Moncton-based team with a guaranteed source of funds and a level of job security lacking at QUESCREN, its Montreal-based counterpart.

## **A Call to Action: Supporting the Ecosystem of Research on English-Speaking OLMCs**

Research, especially university-based research, is essential for understanding OLMCs and for developing appropriate policies and programs. As such, it is a key component of OLMC vitality. University-based research is produced within large and complex ecosystems of stakeholders, processes and institutions. Given the federal government's mandate to support OLMC vitality, it makes sense that the federal government should be

at the forefront in supporting both university-based research and university research ecosystems dedicated to OLMCs.

QUESCREN calls on the federal government to provide increased and sustained funding for both university-based research and the university research ecosystem focused on English-speaking Quebec. By doing so, the government would support both knowledge production and the infrastructures such as universities that are essential elements of a vital OLMC in Quebec.

**In order to help build this research ecosystem, QUESCREN requests of the Canadian Government an endowment that would generate a minimum of \$1,500,000 over the next five years (\$300,000 per year). Additional project funds for targeted research initiatives should also be made available.**

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