

University of Ottawa

Brief to the

Blue-Ribbon Panel on Funding for the Postsecondary Sector

Introduction

The University of Ottawa thanks the government and the Blue-Ribbon Panel for this unique opportunity to make suggestions aimed at strengthening the postsecondary sector in Ontario.

The University shares many of the concerns expressed by our fellow Ontario institutions and subscribes to the recommendations put forward by the Council of Ontario Universities and the U6 concerning required changes in policy in the area of tuition fees and general operating grants for universities.

Given the unique role of our university—as laid down in our founding legislation— in relation to the Franco-Ontarian community, we will focus solely on the issue of funding of francophone programs offered by Francophone and bilingual institutions.

In this brief we will recommend:

- A funding formula based on the actual cost of delivering programs
- Funding linked to meeting objectives in support of Francophone communities
- Creation of an innovation fund to encourage collaboration across the Francophone postsecondary system

The University's impact is felt across Ontario and beyond. For 175 years, the University of Ottawa has been a proud partner of the Ontario government and Franco-Ontarians through innovative programs that reflect the needs and aspirations of young Francophones and give them the tools they need to contribute to the growth and vitality of their communities. This education also gives them the opportunity to have experiences that play a role in strengthening their cultural and linguistic identity. Our graduates have settled in every region of the province, providing essential services in French to their fellow citizens, starting businesses that attract newcomers and contributing to the cultural vitality of their communities. Working together, we are building strong and prosperous communities and addressing the growing shortage of skilled bilingual and Francophone workers, in addition to meeting our obligations under the French Language Services Act.

Fundamental principles

In this brief, we subscribe to three fundamental principles:

1. The *financial viability* of the University of Ottawa and all Francophone and bilingual universities
2. Respect for *equity* to ensure that all students—Anglophones and Francophones alike—receive an experience and education of comparable quality
3. The fundamental importance of *co-operation among Francophone and bilingual institutions* to meet the government's objectives and the aspirations of Franco-Ontarian communities

University of Ottawa profile

The University of Ottawa is a key partner enabling Ontario to train and attract the range of talent needed to maintain its status as an economic engine in Canada and to continue to be competitive in the knowledge-based economy.

With 14,679 students enrolled in more than 250 French-language undergraduate programs and more than 180 graduate programs, the University is by far the largest Francophone or bilingual university in the province. In 2020, the University alone accounted for 80.2% of enrolment in university programs delivered wholly or partly in French in Ontario.

In addition, the University continues to increase the number of programs that meet the need for workers and specialized professionals in Francophone communities. For example, in 2023, we are launching a new pharmacy program that will complement other health-care training programs that are offered solely in French. The University announced in February that, effective in fall 2024, we will be expanding our range of programs taught in French in disciplines that are key to the future of Ontario's Francophonie, namely engineering and sciences, with direct access to the labour market via our Kanata North campus, located in the heart of the country's largest technology innovation centre. And far from our main campus, the University of Ottawa offers teacher education programs in Windsor and Toronto, and programs in common law in Calgary and Saskatoon, as part of the federal strategy to promote access to justice in French.

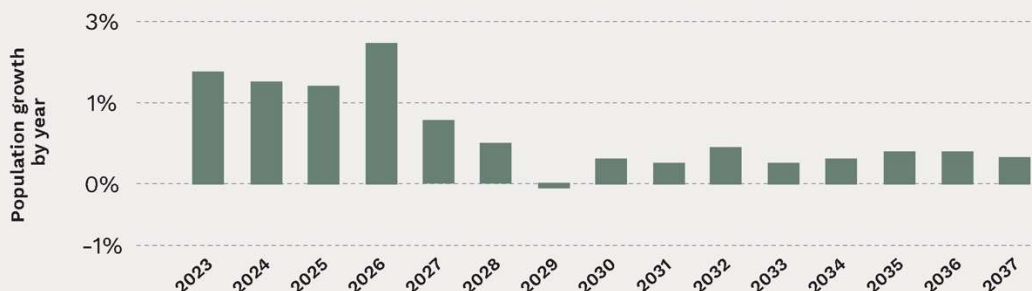
The University of Ottawa's impact is therefore felt across Ontario. The University trains 80% of Francophone teachers in the province, as well as all of the lawyers and physicians who receive their education in French. In addition, our graduates enter the labour market with a competitive advantage—bilingualism. According to the 2021 Statistics Canada census, Ontario workers who speak English and French earn 19% more than unilingual Anglophones on average and 75% more than unilingual Francophones. In Toronto, the corresponding increases are 30% and 100%, respectively.¹

Although the University recruits more than half of our Francophone students in Ontario, we attract thousands every year not only from French-speaking official-language minority communities in Canada, but also from Quebec and abroad, with a significant increase in recruitment in French-speaking Africa seen over the past few years. Not only do our international students study in Canada,² more than 88% also settle here on completion of their studies, in support of Ontario's Francophone immigration strategy. These highly-sought immigrants make a large contribution to Ontario communities and to our prosperity by helping to remedy the shortage of skilled Francophone and bilingual workers. International students will continue to take on added importance in a demographic context where the number of young people of university age in Ontario is forecast to see only very slow growth (Fig. 1).

¹<https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/t1/tbl1/en/tv.action?pid=9810020201&pickMembers%5B0%5D=1.1&pickMembers%5B1%5D=2.1&pickMembers%5B2%5D=3.1>

² When we compare them to Canadian students, we see that a larger proportion of Francophone international students enrol in two key faculties: engineering (21% versus 14%) and management (22% versus 12%).

Figure 1 - Projected Growth of Ontario Population Ages 18 to 20



The University of Ottawa's attraction is strengthened by our reputation as the largest bilingual (French-English) university in the world, and by the growing impact of our research. We are the only Francophone Ontario university among the members of the U15 group, consisting of Canada's leading research-intensive universities. We therefore enjoy national and international prestige, enabling Ontario to shine on the global Francophone stage. The University is in fact the seventh ranked French-language university in the world, and the second in Canada, according to the prestigious Times Higher Education rankings.³ Given the chronic underfunding of our Francophone and bilingual mission, the impact of which we will show later on, that is an extraordinary achievement.

As a leader in the delivery of quality programs that meet the needs of the labour market and Ontario's Francophone community, the University of Ottawa is a vital pillar of a financially viable French-language postsecondary education system.

Key issues

The major issues underpinning the panel's work have been clearly set out by the government:

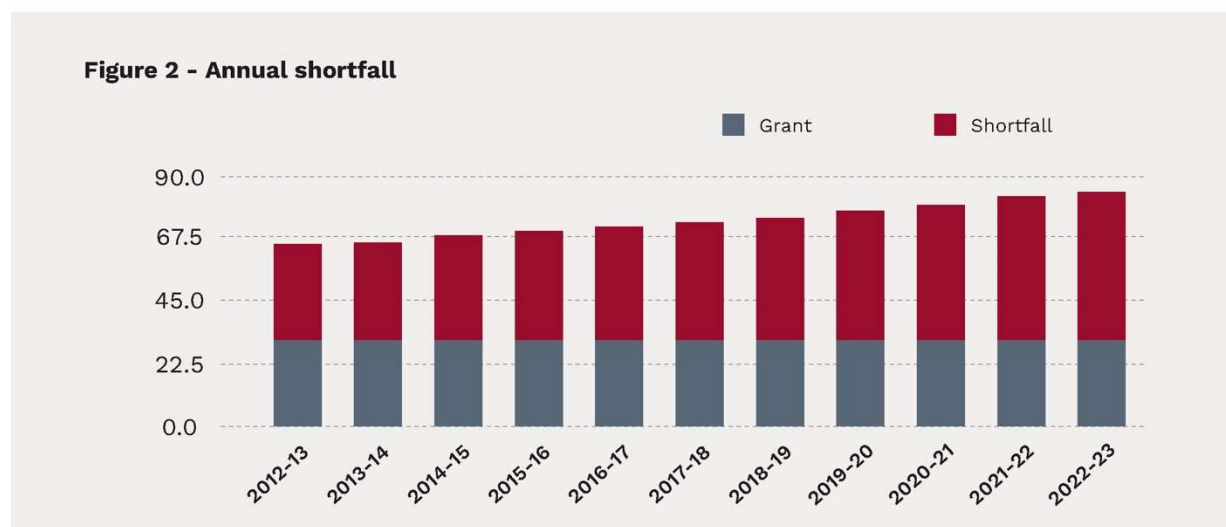
- Financial viability
- Quality of the student experience
- Integration into the labour market and society

The University of Ottawa subscribes fully to these three principles. The University wants to give the best experience possible to our 48,000 students, one third of whom are Francophones, to ensure they are best equipped to succeed in the labour market and contribute to the growth of their communities. The chief obstacle to enhancing the student experience right now is funding.

³ The University of Ottawa ranks 137th in the world according to Times Higher Education. The Université de Montréal ranks 111th, and the five other French-language institutions ahead of Ottawa all come under the Université de Paris rubric.

Annual shortfall of \$50 million

At present, due to stagnating special grants combined with increased costs in connection with our Francophone mission, **the University of Ottawa has an annual shortfall of approximately \$50 million** (Fig. 2).



Ensuring that Francophone students' experience is equivalent to that of their Anglophone counterparts generates additional expenses, such as professor and support staff hires, as well as costs related to the library, IT, translation, immersion programs and education in a second language. Those costs greatly exceed the grants currently allocated by the province.

The methodology used for calculating this underfunding is solid.⁴ It was validated by MCU in 2017–2018, when the University of Ottawa took part in a working group that included representatives of all of the Francophone and bilingual universities at that time. It was also validated in a Conference Board of Canada report released in January 2016.

The cumulative shortfall since the last increase in the so-called “bilingual” grant in 2010 is **\$450 million. The impact on our operations requires that the grant be recalculated to take increased costs into account, due especially to the ravages of inflation.**

To ensure the long-term financial stability of the University of Ottawa and the French-language postsecondary education system, it is critical that the funding formula is based on the actual cost of delivering programs in French. The current situation is forcing universities to fund their added costs from their operating budgets, to the detriment of the student experience.

The new formula must include an indexing factor adjusted for inflation. The new formula should also ensure that real-time compensation for the increased costs inherent in fulfilling the University's Francophone mission is provided. That would allow the University of Ottawa to reinvest in support measures that would enrich the student experience directly.

⁴ *Costs and Benefits of Bilingualism at the University of Ottawa*, May 2014.

Recommendation: A funding formula based on the *actual* cost of delivering French-language programs

To ensure the long-term financial stability of the French-language postsecondary education system, we recommend that:

- A revised formula be used to calculate funding for institutions, and that it be based on the full cost of delivering French-language education programs and providing a high-quality student experience
- Core funding be increased annually by a certain percentage to take into account inflation and real-time changes in the (higher) costs involved in serving Francophone students

Impact of shortfall on students

The shortfall has had to be charged to the University's operating budget and has already weakened the University's ability to properly fund a number of activity sectors that are critical to our mission. As a result, our university has been forced to spend considerably less than other institutions in sectors that are at the core of our *raison d'être* - student education and support. For example, the number of faculty has not kept pace with the increase in the number of students. Furthermore, infrastructure maintenance continues to be deferred, despite its vital importance for the quality of community life on campus.

Simply increasing the number of faculty to the Ontario average would enable the University to considerably enrich student education, but at an additional annual cost of \$27.5 million.

This annual underfunding must be rectified so that the University of Ottawa can completely fulfil its mission towards Anglophone and Francophone students.

A review of the key indicators of financial health shared by COFO shows that of the six major research universities in Ontario, the University of Ottawa ranks sixth on four of the indicators, and fifth on the other indicator.⁵

Urgent need to catch up

Among Ontario's bilingual universities, the University of Ottawa has by far been the most disadvantaged by the special grant funding mechanism (Fig. 2). Owing to the rapid growth in the number of Francophone students, which has not been offset by the current so-called "bilingual" grant formula (See Appendix A), *per student* funding allocated to the University of Ottawa via the special grant is far below that received by other universities via the grant (Table 1).

Funding per Francophone student, 2020–2021		
University	FR students	\$ per student
Laurentian	1,865	\$6,009
York/Glendon	1,805	\$5,527
Ottawa	14,180	\$2,328

Equitable funding of Francophone and bilingual universities has a direct impact on Ontario's widely scattered

⁵ Across the entire network, the University of Ottawa ranks between 8th and 19th out of 20 universities. See 2021–22 *Financial Health Metrics for All Ontario Universities* (COFO).

Francophone population, which deserves greater access to universities. The current funding formula must be updated to remedy this uneven treatment across the province.

In addition to a revised funding formula, another way to ensure that institutional funding is more transparent where government priorities, Francophone community needs and students are concerned would be to tie specific grants to performance objectives and Strategic Mandate Agreements. Some examples include:

- Skill development outcomes aligned with market needs and opportunities for Francophone graduates
- Economic and community impact of Francophone and bilingual institutions
- Number of programs and courses taught in French
- Number of institutional partnerships

Recommendation: *Funding linked to meeting objectives in support of Francophone communities*

To establish equity among institutions and to ensure that programs offered are aligned with community needs and the government's priorities, we recommend that grants tied to the mission of the French-language postsecondary education system reflect compliance with performance criteria linked to community needs. We encourage the Ministry to work with institutions and to define common parameters that can be incorporated into Strategic Mandate Agreements in the future.

Reinvesting in an enhanced student experience

Remedying the underfunding issue will make it possible to launch new initiatives that will have an immediate positive impact on the student experience:

- Increased on-the-job learning and services for transitioning to the labour market; reception and support services, both curricular (writing support, mentoring, tutoring, etc.) and extracurricular
- Improved access to work placements and other experiential learning opportunities, particularly in rapidly growing sectors of the economy, including cutting-edge technologies
- Improvement of infrastructure designed to support community life on campus—residences, food services, sport and cultural activities, for example
- Enhanced recruitment capacity abroad and reception and support services for Francophone international students, to better oversee, guide and ensure their success, not only academic but also social, so they can become part of Ontario society and the labour market more quickly in key sectors

Interinstitutional collaboration is the future

Close to three-quarters of Francophone graduates stay in the province after graduation. This translates into a significant contribution to the economic growth and competitiveness of Ontario. Nonetheless, the challenges stemming from the underfunding of uOttawa's Francophone and bilingual mission are enormous and have been getting worse for decades. Solutions will require a considerable increase in

government funding. That said, any equitable solution must make it possible to meet the objectives of financial viability, enhancement of the student experience, and improved integration of graduates in the labour market.

Solutions will hinge on strong, innovative and effective partnerships. Chronic underfunding of the Francophone sector and the fact that Ontario's Francophone population is scattered across a wide area mean that no one can go it alone.

Recommendation: An innovation fund to encourage collaboration across the Francophone postsecondary system

To encourage co-operation among institutions offering French-language programs, the University of Ottawa recommends that an innovation fund for the Francophone postsecondary education system be created. Such a multiyear fund would:

- Encourage alignment of programs with changing labour market needs
- Support the development of new program delivery models
- Capitalize on the strengths of the existing mechanism and ensure that Francophone students have access across Ontario to a range of high-quality programs that prepare them for professional success

Conclusion

To truly accomplish their mission, universities must contribute to job creation and meet the changing needs of the labour market, as well as the aspirations of Ontario youth. This is particularly true regarding Francophone youth, whom Francophone communities across Ontario are counting on to ensure their growth.

To achieve this, we must ensure respect for the three principles underlying this brief: institutions' financial viability, equity in the experience offered to Francophones and to Anglophones, and greater collaboration among postsecondary institutions, to strengthen the entire system.

The recommendations we are making would ensure the financial stability of Francophone and bilingual universities. We absolutely must establish a funding formula that reflects the real cost of education in French according to the objectives set by the government and support innovative projects favouring program collaboration and alignment that lead to new educational options for Franco-Ontarian youth.

Remedying the chronic underfunding of Francophone and bilingual postsecondary education would be a win-win situation for all the partners: our communities, our families and our Francophone students.

APPENDIX A

SPECIAL-PURPOSE GRANTS TO SUPPORT FRANCOPHONE AND BILINGUAL EDUCATION: SUMMARY OF KEY POINTS

MCU currently administers the following grants related to Francophonie and Bilingualism:

- Bilingualism Grant
- French Language - Access
- Official Language Education (OLE) Complimentary - Federal Contribution
- OLE Complementary - Provincial Contribution
- OLE French as Minority Language - Federal Contribution
- OLE French as Minority Language - Provincial Contribution
- OLE French as Second Language - Federal Contribution

The most significant of these envelopes is the Bilingualism Grant, which has not increased since 2010, resulting in a current \$50M annual funding shortfall for the University of Ottawa. This grant is set at the discretion of the Ontario Government, while the remaining grants are under the Canada-Ontario Agreement, and beyond the purview of the Blue-Ribbon Panel. **We recommend that MCU update the formula for the Bilingualism Grant for all institutions to reflect the full cost of delivering French-language education programs and providing a high-quality student experience.**

Last revised in 1992, the formula is currently based on seven cost drivers:

- Supplementary courses
- Second language training
- Library operations
- Translation services
- Publishing, printing, stationery and supplies
- Administrative staff
- Computer Services

These cost drivers above do not take several important factors into consideration:

- Growth in student numbers:
 - Between 1992 and 2004, the value of the Bilingualism Grant was indexed at the rate of change of the Basic Operating Grant (rather than institutional growth): expanded program offerings and increased enrolment since 2004 thus had no impact on an institution's share of the grant
 - Countable supplementary courses are limited to a single section; in many cases at the University of Ottawa, multiple supplementary sections need to be offered several times each year to improve students' path to graduation
- Inflation:
 - The amount of the grant has not increased since 2010
- The pace of technological and other change:
 - Some IT costs are considered, but there is a pressing need to recognize physical space and technology needs, including the requirement of the modern learning space (e.g., audio-visual and remote learning equipment)
- Significant services to Francophone communities required by the University of Ottawa mandate