

C O N S E I L S U P É R I E U R D E L ' É D U C A T I O N



**THE INTERNATIONALIZATION OF QUÉBEC
COLLEGES: A WORLD OF POSSIBILITIES**

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SUMMARY

Québec 

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With its brief¹ *The Internationalization of Québec Colleges: A World of Possibilities*, the Conseil supérieur de l'éducation has focused its attention on the Québec college education system and—more specifically—the internationalization of the teaching component of its mission. The Conseil thus examined two distinct yet complementary areas: 1) the internationalization of the curriculum, and 2) the attractiveness of Québec colleges among international students.

I: THE INTERNATIONALIZATION OF THE CURRICULUM

ISSUE 1: A WELL-PLANNED APPROACH TO INTERNATIONALIZATION

In general, literature on the internationalization of education espouses a stronger link between the internationalization of post-secondary education and student learning through a variety of means. This translates into the following concerns:

- That the internationalization of post-secondary education be accompanied by measurable outcomes of student learning;
- That students, by the end of their college studies, acquire the knowledge needed to succeed in a pluralistic Québec society where the labour market is driven by the demands of the global economy;
- That colleges and teachers view student mobility as an integral part of the learning process;
- That the offer of student mobility be integrated in programs of study and that access to these be facilitated.

The Conseil has observed that throughout the Québec college network, international and/or intercultural components are often included in teaching practices. Indeed, there are many colleges that have underscored the importance of these components in a variety of ways. College network players share concerns related to the internationalization of education, however have not made this a target: Many have shown initiative in updating and adapting programs to be more attuned to a current, culturally diverse society interconnected with the rest of the world, yet some of them are also wary of the need to internationalize every college program offered. Receptive and constructive in equal parts, these players are gradually charting an approach to the internationalization of Québec college curriculum. To ensure this approach is well-planned, the Conseil recommends the following actions:

1 For the full version of the Conseil's brief (in French only), see *Un monde de possibilités : l'internationalisation des formations collégiales*.

INCLUDE PEDAGOGICAL CONCERNS IN INSTITUTIONAL CULTURE

Taking ownership of pedagogical concerns that stem from the internationalization of the Québec college curriculum entails integrating them both institutionally (in strategic plans and international education policies) and academically (in establishing and revising programs, and the offer of courses and student mobility programs). Moreover, this local ownership requires greater clarity in the course outlines of international programs offered by colleges, notably in the unique learning opportunities they offer.

HARMONIZE EFFORTS AT THE PROGRAM LEVEL

While literature on the internationalization of education provides many means to do so, this is often carried out in silos without initiative or support from program teams. That being said, the Conseil does not advocate systematically including intercultural competencies or competencies requiring a global perspective in every program of study submitted for ministerial approval. Rather it believes that it would be prudent if the program team defined the learning required, as knowledge and skills acquired by the students would be better aligned with social and professional expectations shaped by today's globalization and cultural diversity. In some cases these demands may not greatly impact programs, yet in others, harmonized efforts at the program level could result in pedagogical coherence and ensure the internationalization of education does not rest solely on a small number of teachers.

BUILD ON A VARIETY OF TEACHING METHODS

In the internationalization of education, the Conseil has noted that study abroad programs are favoured by colleges. In this regard it observed a strong consensus among all stakeholders on the importance of clarity in outlining the pedagogical objectives of these programs. Provided that they are conceived and evaluated as an integral part of the learning process, these programs can offer tangible benefits which the Conseil recognizes and deems worth promoting.

Nevertheless, other means exist, which can vary by objectives, content, approach and outcomes. They all have in common decentralizing the course content to include multiple starting points for theory and practice. Using a comparative approach between Québec and other parts of the world merits consideration as part of the overall internationalization of education complementary to study abroad programs.

ISSUE 2: STUDENT MOBILITY PROGRAMS AS AN INTEGRAL PART OF THE LEARNING PROCESS

Literature consulted by the Conseil reveals that a shift has occurred in the presumed intrinsic value of student mobility. In fact, it is now believed that to produce the expected benefits, a student mobility program must be planned as an integral part of the learning process by defining the objectives and the means to achieve them and produce the desired outcomes. The Conseil therefore concurs that student mobility programs should be conceived as part of the learning process to be managed at the institutional level. This entails supporting students in preparing for their experience abroad, during

their stay and upon their return. Currently in Québec, government funding for student mobility as well as some college practices support this concept.

Although many colleges have already developed their own methods to manage the pedagogical component of student mobility programs, these are neither well-documented nor uniformly implemented across programs of study, either intra- or inter-institutionally. For the Conseil, conceiving student mobility programs as a part of the learning process requires:

SUPPORTING TEACHERS WHO MENTOR STUDENTS AND OVERSEE THE PEDAGOGICAL COMPONENT

Teachers are front-line stakeholders in the internationalization of education. As such the Conseil acknowledges their key role both in establishing student mobility programs as an integral part of the learning process and in the mentoring of participating students.

TAKING OWNERSHIP OF THE PEDAGOGICAL COMPONENT

Implementing favourable conditions to improve management of the pedagogical component of a student mobility program must be supported by means that enable demonstrating it. Thus it is critical from the outset to formalize the objectives pursued and the means undertaken to achieve them. It could then be possible to demonstrate to students, teachers, professionals and international partners the pedagogical merit of the program.

DEVELOPING A CULTURE OF EVALUATION

In the Québec college network, the outcomes of student mobility within a given program of study are often tied to specific competencies within the program itself. Consequently, any secondary outcomes (intercultural skills, second language skills, etc.) are often complementary and not part of the formal learning objectives. In the spirit of ongoing improvement, the Conseil recommends institutions develop a culture of evaluating student mobility programs, by adopting qualitative and quantitative indicators related to student learning and the pedagogical reinvestment that ensues for teachers and college professionals.

SUPPORTING SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN INTER-INSTITUTIONAL PARTNERSHIPS

College players met by the Conseil expressed concern over the lack of tangible structural measures in the area of inter-institutional partnership. In their experience, it is essentially up to each teacher in each college to find a counterpart, institution, company or organization abroad that would accept a Québec exchange student. At the same time, these players have been shaken by the recent public outcry over travel expenses used to establish these partnerships. The Conseil therefore invites the government to strengthen its support to college players, who through their work embody ministerial and governmental policies of internationalization in the field of post-secondary education.

FOSTERING GREATER ACCESSIBILITY

Literature in the field of mobility shows that the offer of student mobility programs in a school setting has the potential to reach all students, giving each the opportunity to master the world stage. However, improving accessibility does not necessarily guarantee equal access, nor equality in the learning acquired. In other words, despite an offer that aspires to be universal, the persistence of social inequalities is likely. While the Conseil is aware that students must contribute financially to their study abroad—as budgets are limited and could never fully meet demand—it believes taking the socioeconomic circumstances of participating students into account could ensure that the offer reaches those with more modest means or those who rarely have the opportunity to travel abroad.

II: THE ATTRACTIVENESS OF QUÉBEC COLLEGES AMONG INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

ISSUE 1: THE GOAL OF ATTRACTING INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

In recent years, the Québec college network has experienced an increase in the number of international students enrolled in one or more of its programs of study. (Despite this increase, the number of international students—3,061 in 2011—remains modest.) This is overwhelmingly due to the number of students exempted from paying tuition fees. In the public network alone, this trend is even more pronounced: between 2007 and 2011, international students exempted from paying tuition represented 80% of all international students. Of this number, the clear majority were French, and exempt under a France-Québec agreement on education. Compared with programs of study offered in other parts of the world, the drawing power of Québec colleges is weak, particularly among tuition-paying students.

Since 2008, the Québec government has introduced a number of measures that resulted in highly-targeted recruitment of international students, as the typical profile of an individual likely to meet government criteria can be defined as: one wishing to enrol in a technical program in a field with a forecast labour shortage in an institution with low enrolment or spaces available.

Australia, France and Sweden have recently adopted strategies and large-scale initiatives that manifest their desire to increase the attractiveness of their post-secondary education among international students. For its part, Québec has not yet adopted structured reforms likely to fundamentally change the drawing power of its post-secondary education among students—including programs of study at the college level.

The Conseil questions the long-term viability of basing the attractiveness of Québec colleges on free tuition for the vast majority of international students simply to fill empty spaces in programs with low enrolment and to meet immigration targets. While it recognizes the resolve of colleges to recruit international students, the Conseil recommends that current objectives be revisited to move beyond the need to survive to promote Québec colleges by:

DEFINING A STRATEGY TO ATTRACT INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS BASED ON QUALITY PROGRAMS OF STUDY

Beyond the issue of tuition for international students, there is a need to leverage the teaching and learning that define Québec's college programs of study, including their quality, comparability and reputation internationally. The Conseil therefore calls on the Government of Québec to define a strategy to attract international students based on the excellence of programs of study and to redraft the current international recruitment objectives. At the same time, it recommends colleges revise their own promotion strategies for international students by focusing on the quality of their programs of study as a drawing card.

PROMOTING QUÉBEC COLLEGES WITH A CENTER OF EXPERTISE

Currently, the features of Québec college programs that embody an excellence likely to draw international students are not exploited to the extent they should be. In fact, promotional and informational material does not fully describe the type of education that can be acquired in Québec colleges. For example, in the case of a Diploma of College Studies (DEC), the requirement to pass the General Education component and a compulsory language examination is not clearly indicated. Also, in consulting Australian, French and Swedish websites, the Conseil noted that the navigability of Québec websites is not at all comparable. To significantly increase the attractiveness of Québec colleges, it recommends creating a center of expertise to establish strategies inspired from best practices observed around the world.

ISSUE 2: COMPARABILITY AND INTERNATIONAL RECOGNITION OF QUÉBEC COLLEGES

One of the major challenges in increasing the attractiveness of Québec colleges is the need for greater clarity in the descriptions of their programs for other education systems. Terms such as "cegep," "college" and "technician" can often appear confusing elsewhere, however there are many education programs that are equivalent without being identical to those offered in the Québec college network. In addition, past student exchange programs have shown that when foreign students and institutions have had the experience, Québec colleges gain respect and recognition internationally. Creating a reference framework of college programs of study in Québec could be useful in placing them along the post-secondary education continuum and clearly positioning them vis-à-vis the current global offer. Colleges could also use this framework in interactions with their foreign counterparts.

ISSUE 3: FORMALIZING HOSTING PRACTICES FOR INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

Welcoming international students rests largely on the commitment and dedication of individuals, who have the educational reputation of their institution and the well-being and success of the students at heart. The Conseil nonetheless proposes that hosting practices be formalized to provide clarity as to the type of education experience offered in Québec. While the quality of this experience and the commitment of its teachers and professionals are unquestioned within its borders, international students should be able to count on clearly-defined and recognized standards that give them confidence in Québec's education system. To this end, the Conseil recommends the following three measures:

BUILD ON A FORMAL FRAMEWORK FOR ADMISSION

By establishing a formal framework for admitting international students, the college network would acquire a practical promotional tool. In addition, adhering to the highest international standards in the field would require college institutions to inform international students of the academic and financial obligations involved in pursuing studies in Québec, specify the student services they provide and disclose all obligations on their part.

OFFER RECOGNIZED LANGUAGE PROGRAMS

To address the lack of “critical mass” experienced by colleges with small numbers of international students, the Conseil recommends these colleges work together to offer language courses that would lead to official certificates recognized by all post-secondary institutions in Québec and beyond.

INCREASE TRANSPARENCY REGARDING TUITION FEES

The Conseil deems that information regarding tuition fees must be sufficiently transparent so that international students are informed of the true total cost of their education in Québec. This increased transparency must also extend to the Ministère de l'Enseignement supérieur, de la Recherche, de la Science et de la Technologie so that decisions to increase tuition fees do not affect the foreseeable cost for international students. Lastly, greater communication between the Ministère and the Québec college network on the rules and figures that prevail when tuition rates are set would also facilitate reaching a common understanding of this issue.

CONCLUSION

In its brief, the Conseil notes the commitment in many parts of the world to increase the attractiveness of post-secondary education among international students. It would seem that Québec must move in this direction so that its colleges are aligned with this fundamental trend. Today, recognition of quality is no longer limited to the society from which graduates hail; it extends to all those who have experienced it, near or afar. In short, Québec has everything to gain from the recognition of its college programs beyond its borders.

In addition to the brief, the Conseil has produced a supplemental document entitled *Un monde de possibilités : l'internationalisation des formations collégiales – Données et recherches complémentaires* (available in French only). This document includes data on international collaborations with the Québec college network, data on student mobility funded by Les Offices jeunesse internationaux du Québec, an overview of tuition fees charged to international students in the Québec college system, as well as an analysis of strategies adopted in Australia, France, Sweden and Ontario to increase international student enrolment.