

## Summary

The contribution of Québec universities to the development of society is part of the rapid changes faced today by industrialized societies. Increased access to higher education and advancement in research are assets that will enable Québec to continue in its development and to fully participate in a knowledge-based society. Thus, the Conseil supérieur de l'éducation reaffirms that the mission of Québec universities is to provide higher education to the people of Québec. The three pillars of this mission are the essential activities of teaching, research and service to the community. Through these activities, universities can play a part in individual growth, technological innovation, the advancement of society and culture as well as in the internationalization of research and education. This is the central message of the Conseil in its brief *Des acquis à préserver et des défis à relever pour les universités québécoises* [Upholding the Achievements and Meeting the Challenges Of Québec Universities].

In this brief, the Conseil defines the key challenges facing Québec universities:

- furthering their contribution towards the expansion of education among the general population, so as to meet, notably, Québec's increasing need for a highly-qualified workforce;
- developing research balanced with teaching;
- forging a partnership with the Government and taking into consideration the needs of the community;

To meet these challenges, the Québec university system could capitalize on some of its major achievements, namely:

- the diversity of its institutions, for example, regional universities and those in urban areas playing complementary roles in both local development and in the economic development of Québec as a whole;
- the substantial amount of public funding allotted to Québec universities compared to the rest of Canada; a reflection of Québec's choice in making education more accessible;
- the long-standing tradition of public consultation that has made the Québec university an institution connected to the community.

## Expanding Education In Québec

The Conseil wishes to acknowledge the outstanding contribution of Québec universities in expanding education among the general population. Statistics reveal that access to a university education is constantly rising. For example, while only 17.9% of young people aged 20 to 24 attended university in 1990, this rate reached 25.4% in 2006. The percentage of graduate studies degree holders has also increased—indeed it has surpassed the objectives set by the Conseil for 2010.

The Conseil emphasizes, however, that despite this significant progress special effort must be invested in the area of access to higher education, passing courses and student retention and graduation, particularly among some segments of the population. In this regard, the Conseil notes:

- a widening gap between genders in the area of access to an undergraduate degree during the past two decades;
- less access to university education for students from low-income families or whose parents do not have a university education;
- a lower rate of university education among people living in the regions;
- issues related to retention and graduation among part-time university students.

An examination of the history of public funding of universities across Canada reveals that Québec institutions have a lower general operations funding per student than the average Canadian university. The Conseil deems that this presents challenges in the areas of student services and the competitiveness of Québec universities.

### **The Development Of Research**

In its brief, the Conseil notes the significant research advances made at Québec universities, particularly in the past decade. However, it deems that funding for research must continue to grow in Québec at the same rate as the rest of Canada, and that this be done for the various fields of activity. Moreover, in order to uphold the mission entrusted to universities, the Conseil invites all Ministers responsible for academic research to engage in increased dialogue.

In addition, the Conseil reminds universities of the importance of ensuring that research conducted with outside partners meets the requirements of the respective programs of studies and university policies. In conclusion, it recommends that universities maintain the proper balance between teaching, research and service to the community in all teaching activities as well as in academic hiring and promotion practices.

### **A Partnership Between Universities and Government**

Lastly, the Conseil reaffirms the values of academic freedom and university autonomy as well as ethical probity and scientific standards in universities in fulfilling their mission. However, it also believes that these values come with obligations, such as considering the needs and aspirations of the various groups in society. Consequently, it recommends strengthening the accountability processes of universities to best reflect the accomplishment of their mission, particularly in the area of the quality of teaching, research and their nexus. The Conseil also recommends that the Minister of Education, Recreation and Sport, in her stewardship of the university system, undertake an assessment of universities.

This brief and its supporting statistical documentation are available in French on the website of the Conseil supérieur de l'éducation at: [www.cse.gouv.qc.ca](http://www.cse.gouv.qc.ca).