



## Investigation Report

### **Cancellation of the Fellowships for Studying in French: *It pays to do your homework***

October 2013

La voix d'accès. Your Voice Matters.



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NOTE: The masculine gender is used in this report solely to make the text easier to read.

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# 1. Background

The Fellowships for Studying in French program was introduced by the Ontario government in 1975-1976. Each year, \$1,500 non-renewable fellowships were available to some 800 postsecondary students with a sufficiently high level of academic performance.

Since its establishment 37 years ago, the aim of “[t]he Fellowships for Studying in French program [has been] to encourage Ontario residents to enter full-time postsecondary programs offered in French at French-language or bilingual institutions in Ontario.”<sup>1</sup> When a specific program of study was unavailable in French in Ontario, the fellowships could also be used to pursue a postsecondary education in French elsewhere in Canada. The fellowships program was partly funded by the Department of Canadian Heritage but was fully administered by the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities of Ontario.

The goal was compatible with one of the guiding principles in the Ministry’s 2011 *Politique d’aménagement linguistique: A Policy Framework for French-Language Postsecondary Education and Training in Ontario*, which is to “identify and address obstacles that prevent Francophone students from pursuing their studies in French.”<sup>2</sup>

## 1.1 Chronology

The fellowships program was nevertheless eliminated in the April 24, 2012, budget. The

Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities cancelled it following the discontinuation of several Ontario Student Assistance Program (OSAP) funding plans in order to pay for the Ministry’s 30% Off Ontario Tuition program, which provides assistance to students from low-income families who choose to pursue a postsecondary education in Ontario, regardless of their language of study.

On May 1, 2012, the University of Ottawa and *La Cité collégiale* made joint representations to the Ontario government, requesting that it reverse its decision to eliminate the fellowships program.<sup>3</sup>

The Office of the French Language Services Commissioner subsequently began receiving complaints and requests for assistance regarding the cancellation of the Fellowships for Studying in French, just as it was about to publish its report entitled *The State of French-Language Postsecondary Education in Central-Southwestern Ontario: No access, no future*,<sup>4</sup> which was released on June 27, 2012.

Meanwhile, in response to the concerns expressed by citizens, the Commissioner had already notified the Ministry, on June 20, 2012, that he intended to conduct a formal investigation into the program’s cancellation. If the Commissioner’s Office had learned of the decision to drop the fellowship program before publishing its report on *The State of French-Language Postsecondary Education in Central-Southwestern Ontario*, it would certainly have dealt with it in the report. However, that was not the case.

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<sup>1</sup> Available online: <https://osap.gov.on.ca/OSAPPortal/en/A-ZListofAid/PRD003550.html> (page consulted in September 2013).

<sup>2</sup> Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities, *Politique d’aménagement linguistique: A Policy Framework for French-Language Postsecondary Education and Training in Ontario*, Toronto, 2011. Available online: [http://www.tcu.gov.on.ca/pepg/publications/PAL\\_Eng\\_Web.pdf](http://www.tcu.gov.on.ca/pepg/publications/PAL_Eng_Web.pdf) (page consulted in September 2013).

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<sup>3</sup> Benjamin Vachet, “L’Université d’Ottawa et La Cité collégiale unissent leurs efforts”, *L’Express* (Orléans), week of June 20, 2012.

<sup>4</sup> For more details, see [http://www.csf.gouv.on.ca/wp-content/uploads/2012/06/FLSC\\_FrenchPostsecondaryEducation.pdf](http://www.csf.gouv.on.ca/wp-content/uploads/2012/06/FLSC_FrenchPostsecondaryEducation.pdf) (page consulted in September 2013).

On July 10, 2012, the *Regroupement étudiant franco-ontarien* (RÉFO), which represents the 22,000 French-speaking postsecondary students,<sup>5</sup> launched an online petition to reinstate the Fellowships for Studying in French program on the website [www.change.org/fr](http://www.change.org/fr).

On July 18, 2012, the Ministry's senior management sent the Commissioner a letter outlining the reasons for the decision to eliminate the Fellowships for Studying in French program. On August 13, 2012, the Commissioner asked the Ministry's senior management for clarifications, which were received by the Commissioner's Office on September 19, 2012. The Ministry's responses are reproduced in Appendix A of this report.

On August 22, 2012, the members of the RÉFO's executive and its general coordinator met with the Minister Responsible for Francophone Affairs of Ontario, Madeleine Meilleur, to present the petition, which at that time contained 5,000 signatures. At that meeting, the Minister confirmed to the RÉFO's representatives that the Fellowships for Studying in French program would not be reinstated, but she said that she remained willing to consider alternative solutions.<sup>6</sup>

On October 3, 2012, the petition, which now had nearly 6,000 signatures,<sup>7</sup> was officially submitted to the Legislative Assembly of Ontario by an MPP.

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<sup>5</sup> For more details, see <http://www.refo.ca/organisation.php> (page consulted in September 2013).

<sup>6</sup> Available online: <http://www.radio-canada.ca/regions/ottawa/2012/08/23/010-bourse-ontario-franco.shtml> (page consulted in September 2013).

<sup>7</sup> When the online petition to reinstate the Fellowships for Studying in French closed, it had a total of 5,929 signatures. Available online: <http://www.change.org/fr/p%C3%A9titions/p%C3%A9tition-pour-r%C3%A9instaurer-la-bourse-pour-%C3%A9tudier-en-fran%C3%A7ais-en-ontario-2> (page consulted in September 2013).

On October 29, 2012, the members of the RÉFO's executive and its general coordinator met with the Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities. The next day, the RÉFO announced that the Minister had expressed willingness to review the eligibility criteria of the Ontario Distance Grant program, which provides additional financial assistance to OSAP-eligible students who have to travel long distances to reach their postsecondary education program. However, no formal commitment had been obtained from the Minister to reserve part of the program's funding for Francophone students.

On May 13, 2013, during a visit to the University of Ottawa, the Premier of Ontario announced that effective in 2013-2014, Francophone students in Ontario who had to travel at least 80 km to attend full-time studies in French would be eligible for the Ontario Distance Grant, no matter where they live in the province. Following this announcement, on May 15, 2013, the Commissioner's Office asked the Ministry for clarifications, which it received on June 5, 2013. These responses are reproduced in Appendix B of this report.

This investigation report contains an in-depth analysis of the issues arising from the elimination of the Fellowships for Studying in French program. It is based on the responses that the Ministry provided to the Commissioner's Office, statistics concerning access to French-language postsecondary education programs in Ontario, and observations by associations and stakeholders.

## 2. Financial assistance

On Thursday, June 21, 2012, the Orléans newspaper *L'Express* published the comments of Diego Elizondo, a history and political science student at the University of Ottawa who had applied to the Fellowships for Studying in French program just before it was cancelled:

[Translation] “This fellowships program encouraged many Francophone students who live far from here to pursue their education in French. Now maybe they’ll switch to English institutions that are closer to their homes and offer a wider range of programs. With the new 30% Off Ontario Tuition program, I get \$1,600, which is a little more. But the elimination of a program designed specifically to promote studying in French is unfortunate. It may have a negative impact on the demand for French-language postsecondary services.”<sup>8</sup>

These statements raise the question of what factors the government considered to justify such an abrupt change of direction in Ontario’s student assistance programs. For a true picture of the situation – what has been gained and what has been lost – we need to compare the support that used to be provided by the Fellowships for Studying in French program with the support now provided by the 30% Off Ontario Tuition program. Do these two programs generate equivalent outcomes for Ontario’s Francophone and Francophile communities? Do they address the same needs and, all things considered, do they have the same *raison d’être*?

## **2.1 Elimination of the Fellowships for Studying in French and introduction of a new initiative**

The Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities informed the Commissioner’s Office that in 2011-2012, 779 students received a Fellowship for Studying in French, which represents a total investment of about \$1.1 million.<sup>9</sup> Since the introduction of the 30% Off Ontario Tuition program in January 2012, more than 200,000 students

have had their tuition reduced by 30%.<sup>10</sup> This figure includes an estimated 2,700 Francophone and Francophile students or more enrolled in full-time programs at *Collège Boréal*, *La Cité collégiale*, the University of Ottawa and Laurentian University during the 2011-2012 academic year. **Hence, the 30% Off Ontario Tuition program provides financial assistance to more Francophone and Francophile students than the Fellowships for Studying in French program did.**

A Fellowship for Studying in French consisted of a \$1,500 grant that was available only once during a student’s postsecondary education career. The 30% Off Ontario Tuition program, on the other hand, provides students with \$770 per year for college diploma or certificate programs and \$1,680 per year for college and university programs, for up to four years (for a maximum total of \$6,720), or six years for students with a disability. **Thus, the total amount available to a student under the 30% Off Ontario Tuition program during his postsecondary education is greater than the amount provided by the Fellowships for Studying in French program.**

In view of these figures, the Commissioner’s Office is pleased that more Francophones and Francophiles will be able to obtain government assistance to help them overcome the financial barriers to pursuing a postsecondary education. At the moment, however, the financial support provided by OSAP does not take into account their choice to pursue a postsecondary education in French or in English, which is what the Fellowships for Studying in French program did.

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<sup>8</sup> *Supra* note 3.

<sup>9</sup> Letter from the senior management of the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities to the French Language Services Commissioner, received on July 18, 2012.

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<sup>10</sup> Responses from the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities to questions from the French Language Services Commissioner, received on September 19, 2012. See Appendix A.

### Scenario 1

Marie-Soleil recently completed her high school education in French in Ottawa, where she lives with her parents. She is eligible for OSAP and wants to pursue a full-time university education in psychology in her region. She knows that she has the option of enrolling in the B.Sc. program in psychology at the University of Ottawa, where she can take all of her courses in French (or English or both languages), or registering for a similar program at Carleton University, where courses are taught entirely in English.

A year ago, with her excellent academic record, Marie-Soleil was expecting to obtain a Fellowship for Studying in French. The \$1,500 fellowship, which was available to her only once during her university program, encouraged her to pursue her university education in psychology in French at the University of Ottawa.

Marie-Soleil learned that the Fellowships for Studying in French program had been cancelled, and that she was now eligible for the new 30% Off Ontario Tuition program. She will be able to obtain \$1,680 per academic year during her four-year program, for a total of \$6,720. This is more than the \$1,500 that she could have received under the old fellowship program, and she is happy about that. She is eligible for this financial assistance whether she pursues her education in French or in English.

Marie-Soleil decides to study psychology in French at the University of Ottawa. However, one of her high school classmates, Samir, who has the same aspirations as she does and is faced with the same choices, decides to take all of his psychology courses in English, since he no longer sees any real government incentive to pursue his university education in French.

In this regard, the Ministry stated that in 2008-2009, it had established the Ontario Distance Grant program, which provides additional financial assistance to OSAP-eligible students who have to travel more than 80 km from their permanent family home address to reach their postsecondary education program. For those students, the

grant is in addition to the 30% tuition reduction.

## 2.2 Ontario Distance Grant program

The Ontario Distance Grant program provides two types of assistance: grants to cover *travel*,<sup>11</sup> and grants to cover *commuting*.<sup>12</sup> Travel Grants are awarded to dependent students (less than 4 years out of high school) who leave home and move closer to their postsecondary institution to take a full-time program. The value of the grant is \$300 per academic year. Commuting Grants are awarded to dependent students who live at home with their parents while attending school but have to travel more than 80 km to get to the closest postsecondary institution. The value of the grant is \$500 per term, up to a maximum of \$1,500 per academic year.

As the Ministry told the RÉFO, “since only dependent students can receive [the Ontario Distance Grant], it is unlikely that doctoral or postdoctoral students would be eligible for it.”<sup>13</sup> According to the Ministry, 10,557 Ontario students received a Travel Grant in 2011, and 1,262 received a Commuting Grant.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>11</sup> For more details, see <https://osap.gov.on.ca/OSAPPortal/en/A-ZListofAid/PRDR007087.html> (page consulted in September 2013).

<sup>12</sup> For more details, see <https://osap.gov.on.ca/OSAPPortal/en/A-ZListofAid/PRDR007086.html> (page consulted in September 2013).

<sup>13</sup> Available online: <http://www.refo.ca/resources/Questions%20et%20r%C3%A9ponses%20concernant%20les%20Subventions%20ontariennes%20pour%20les%20%C3%A9tudiant.e.s%20des%20r%C3%A9gions%20%C3%A9loign%C3%A9es.pdf> (page consulted in September 2013).

<sup>14</sup> Available online: [http://www.refo.ca/resources/Babillard\\_de\\_nouvelles/REFO%20-%20Les%20priorites%20etudiantes%20pour%20le%20postsecondaire%20en%20Ontario%20français.pdf](http://www.refo.ca/resources/Babillard_de_nouvelles/REFO%20-%20Les%20priorites%20etudiantes%20pour%20le%20postsecondaire%20en%20Ontario%20français.pdf) (page consulted in September 2013).

In the initial follow-up by the Commissioner's Office, the Ministry stated that it had taken the unique nature of Ontarians studying in French into consideration in designing its Ontario Distance Grant program. The Ministry said that students who met OSAP criteria and had to travel more than 80 km to take programs in French at French-language or bilingual institutions were eligible for the Ontario Distance Grant, even if there was an English-language institution closer to their family residence.

After obtaining this information from the Ministry, the Commissioner's Office did a search of its website, including the OSAP sections, and found no mention of this point. The Ministry rectified the situation by updating the OSAP webpage on June 4, 2013, to include information about the expanded Ontario Distance Grant eligibility criteria for Francophone students.

### 3. Differentiating needs and obstacles

Aside from the figures, the Ministry told the Commissioner's Office that its decision to eliminate the Fellowships for Studying in French program was part of the government's efforts to restructure student assistance to address *needs*. **The Ministry also admitted that it did not conduct any formal studies to determine whether the Fellowships for Studying in French program's initial goals and objectives had been achieved before cancelling it.**

Moreover, in a letter to the Commissioner's Office, the Ministry added that it had eliminated the program in the context of a broader strategy of scaling back its role in awards programs based on academic performance.<sup>15</sup> According to the Ministry, that decision was acceptable because of the substantial growth in financial assistance available to students through awards based

on obtaining high marks, which have been partly supported by the Ministry's effective Ontario Student Opportunity Trust Fund/Ontario Trust for Student Support (OSOTF/OTSS) programs.<sup>16</sup> For the Commissioner, even though these programs are providing more assistance now than in the past, it is difficult to compare them with the Fellowships for Studying in French program **because they are not specifically designed to encourage Ontario residents to enrol in French-language postsecondary programs in the province.**

In reality, it was essentially the needs of the student population as a whole that were considered in the decision to do away with the Fellowships for Studying in French program and bring in the 30% Off Ontario Tuition program. Francophones and Francophiles are part of that population, of course, and as such, they also benefit from the new program's effects, but does that mean they have the same needs as the majority? The specific needs of Francophones and Francophiles do not translate into numbers as neatly as the needs of Anglophones, since Francophones and Francophiles are in a minority situation in Ontario.

We should therefore ask ourselves the following question: In the context of pursuing a postsecondary education in Ontario, what are the needs, and for whom?

#### 3.1 Needs of the majority

An Anglophone student, as a member of the majority in Ontario, will need, first of all, sufficient **financial resources** to enrol in a postsecondary program. In other words, he may have to seek **financial assistance**. Then he will have to choose a **program** to enrol in that is consistent with his aspirations, after which he will have to think about how he will travel to his English-language postsecondary institution. If the institution is a long **distance** from his family

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<sup>15</sup> *Supra* note 8.

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<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*

home, he will have to find a way of overcoming that geographic obstacle, possibly by seeking **additional financial assistance**.

Now let's look at the needs that a Francophone or Francophile student would have as a member of the minority in Ontario.

## **3.2 Needs of the minority**

### **3.2.1 Financial resources**

Like his Anglophone counterpart, the Francophone or Francophile student will need enough money to enrol in a post-secondary education program. If he has to seek financial assistance, he may then, like his Anglophone counterpart, apply to OSAP and, if he is eligible, get a 30% reduction in his tuition fees.

### **3.2.2 Limited selection of programs**

Like his Anglophone counterpart, the Francophone or Francophile student in Ontario will need to find a suitable program to enrol in. In this respect, however, he will encounter a major obstacle that the Anglophone student will not face: a feeble 0% to 36% rate of access to French-language entry-level college and university programs in Ontario, depending on the region. In the central-southwestern part of the province more than anywhere else, the access rate is abysmal, ranging from 0% to a mere 3%. That is what led the French Language Services Commissioner to sound the alarm for the Ontario government with his June 27, 2012, report entitled *The State of French-Language Postsecondary Education in Central-Southwestern Ontario: No access, no future*. What good is a 30% reduction in tuition, a travel or commuting grant, or even a fellowship for studying in French if Francophone and Francophile students have no French-language post-secondary education programs in Ontario to enrol in?

In his *No access, no future* report, the Commissioner pointed out that Central-Southwestern Ontario's Francophone community has a higher growth rate than any other Francophone community in the province and by 2020 will account for almost half of the province's Francophone population.<sup>17</sup> The difficulty is that Central-Southwestern Ontario also has the lowest access to French-language postsecondary programs in the province, a situation that the Expert Panel on French-Language Postsecondary Education in Central and Southwestern Ontario, in its report entitled *Moving Forward*, released by the government on January 11, 2013, describes as a *paradox*.

This paradox is causing serious damage to Ontario's Francophonie, since 78% of Francophone students who complete their secondary education in Ontario enrol in English-language programs,<sup>18</sup> including, of course, a large number of students in Central-Southwestern Ontario. Realistically, not all of those students meet the OSAP eligibility criteria, and therefore not all of them will be "saved" by the travel or commuting grants to pursue their postsecondary education in French. While many students are now eligible for the 30% Off Ontario Tuition program, they are entitled to it whether they choose to study in French or in English. That's the reality.

And this desertion of the French-language education system by postsecondary students is not attributable simply to a preference for English-language education. When Francophone high school students were asked about their preferred language

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<sup>17</sup> Expert Panel on French-Language Postsecondary Education in Central and Southwestern Ontario, *Moving Forward*, Toronto, 2013, p. 20. Available online: <http://www.tcu.gov.on.ca/eng/postsecondary/schoolsprograms/MovingForward.pdf>.

<sup>18</sup> Available online: <http://www.radio-canada.ca/regions/ottawa/2012/09/23/005-refo-universite-franco.shtml> (page consulted in September 2013).

for postsecondary education, the majority said they would rather pursue their studies in a French-language college or university program.<sup>19</sup>

Hence, the access problem is a problem *for everyone*, not just for low-income students or students who live far from their postsecondary institution. It is also an obstacle in the entire French-language education system, at both elementary and secondary levels. Parents, students, newcomers and Francophiles are well aware of the fact that they may be stymied by the very limited availability of French-language college and university programs when they start considering the postsecondary options. This has the effect of discouraging them from choosing a French-language education and from sticking with that choice as they progress through the various levels of education in Ontario.

A number of people who signed the RÉFO's petition to reinstate the Fellowships for Studying in French program grasped these issues, as their comments show:<sup>20</sup>

[Translation] "There are always proportionally higher barriers for Franco-Ontarians with regard to pursuing postsecondary studies. [...] The choice to study in French is not an easy one for high school students, when the options for studying in French are *limited*."

— J. D., Ottawa

[Translation] "Ontario's Francophones are scattered across the province, and the number of institutions of higher learning where they can pursue their education in French after secondary school is *very limited*, in contrast to the

number of English-language institutions in the province. That's why it's so important to preserve any government funding initiative that *encourages* them to pursue their education in French and *enhances their access* to French-language programs."

— L. G.-L., Orléans

Let's not mince words: **The increased availability of French-language post-secondary education programs in Ontario must remain the Ministry's top priority at present in the area of Francophone affairs.** The Commissioner has made this issue his primary focus since the publication of his report on the subject. The Ministry itself also made the issue the first strategic area of focus in its 2011 Policy Framework for French-Language Post-secondary Education and Training in Ontario, which is a component of its Putting Students First plan.<sup>21</sup> For its part, the Expert Panel recommended concrete, pragmatic solutions to the government, solutions that are similar to those suggested by the Commissioner in his *No access, no future* report. The Commissioner would of course like to see his recommendations, and those of the Expert Panel, implemented by the Ministry.

**That said, the Fellowships for Studying in French program was one more tool to assist Francophones and Francophiles in pursuing French-language post-secondary studies in Ontario.** Though insufficient in itself, this financial incentive nevertheless contributed to the pursuit of substantive equality of access for the Francophone linguistic minority.

### 3.2.3 Distance barrier

Since there are far fewer postsecondary education programs in French than in English in Ontario, Francophone and Francophile students are forced to travel greater distances more often than their

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<sup>19</sup> Réseau des cégeps et collèges francophones du Canada, *Poursuite des études postsecondaires en milieu minoritaire francophone : intentions des diplômés du secondaire en 2003*, Ottawa, Canadian Heritage, 2003, p. 27.

<sup>20</sup> *Supra* note 7.

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<sup>21</sup> *Supra* note 2.

Anglophone counterparts to access a college or university program in their language. Proportionally speaking, more students who choose to continue in French have to look for solutions to help them cover the resulting additional travel or commuting costs.

That said, studies show that the distance between a Francophone student's home and his college or university has a significant influence on postsecondary education choices.<sup>22</sup> When a student has to choose between, on one hand, leaving home and incurring an additional financial burden to study at a French-language college or university and, on the other, remaining debt-free, he is more likely to decide to go to a local English-language educational institution. Aside from the cost of living away from home, the decision entails emotional costs associated with leaving one's home and one's social and family network.<sup>23</sup> This also has socio-economic repercussions, because lower-income families are disproportionately likely not to live within commuting distance of postsecondary institutions.

In this context, the Ministry's Travel Grants and Commuting Grants — if they are clearly and openly promoted as being available to OSAP-eligible Francophone and Francophile students even when an English-language postsecondary institution is closer — may serve as supports to partially mitigate the distance problem. It is nevertheless very important to bear in mind that this program is open only to students who qualify for OSAP, unlike the Fellowships for Studying in French program, which was available to anyone who decided to pursue a French-language postsecondary education in Ontario. This raises the

following question: What role did the Fellowships for Studying in French program play as a financial support in overcoming the distance barrier?

### 3.2.4 Lack of data

In connection with its investigation, the Commissioner's Office contacted the Ministry on January 10, 2013, to ask whether it had any home address data for students who received a Fellowship for Studying in French in the last few years. In other words, the Commissioner's Office was attempting, for the sake of completeness, to gauge how much of a positive effect the fellowship had on pursuing a French-language postsecondary education for students living in remote areas. For example, if a large number of students in Ottawa had used the fellowship to enrol at *La Cité collégiale* instead of an English-language college in the region, we would have been able to determine that the Fellowships for Studying in French program was indeed a significant incentive unrelated to distance.

However, the Ministry replied that those data had never been compiled and that it was practically impossible to share them because of amount of red tape involved. So, while the raw data currently exist, the only way to compile them would be for the Ministry to reopen and re-examine the applications of all fellowship recipients to find their home address.

This lack of data is a serious challenge for policy-makers responsible for determining the true nature of Francophone "demand" and designing programs and initiatives to meet Francophones' needs. This statistical gap may also have negative repercussions when it comes to estimating the exact nature of the demand for existing programs such as the Fellowships for Studying in French. This in turn may lead to an underestimation of the needs of Francophones and the role that an existing program may play in that regard. This is

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<sup>22</sup> Marc Frenette, *Access to College and University: Does Distance Matter?*, Ottawa, Statistics Canada, 2002. Marc Frenette, *Too Far to Go on? Distance to School and University Participation*, Ottawa, Statistics Canada, 2002.

<sup>23</sup> Marc Frenette, *op. cit.*

particularly true in the case of linguistic minorities, since their needs can easily be overshadowed by those of the majority.

It is a problem that actually goes well beyond the Fellowships for Studying in French program. During the investigation that led to the publication of the *No access, no future* report, it became clear to the Commissioner that the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities had no accurate data on potential French-language postsecondary enrolment.

From the enrolment data it had collected, the Ministry of Education knew, for example, that in the 2009-2010 school year in Central-Southwestern Ontario, there were 3,957 students enrolled in French-immersion programs at the elementary level and 5,381 in Grades 10, 11 and 12. Nevertheless, the Ministry was unable to determine how many of those students had graduated, how many had gone on to postsecondary studies, and even how many had decided to do so in French or in English. In other words, the government has no way of knowing exactly which students enrolling in colleges and universities are Francophones. How, then, will it be able to identify which *Francophones* are getting the 30% reduction in tuition to pursue their postsecondary education in *English* in Ontario?

According to the 2005 Rae report on education in Ontario, the government could consider using the Ontario Education Number (OEN), a unique student number that could track Ontarians from their first contact with school through their entire educational and training career, because “the benefit would be a very complete and accurate picture of educational pathways, transitions, participation rates and outcomes

for the province.”<sup>24</sup> In fact, that is also what the Commissioner recommended in his *No access, no future* report. This system should also be used, of course, to pinpoint the needs of Francophones and Francophiles who take advantage of government programs whose function is to assist them in accessing French-language postsecondary education in Ontario.

### 3.2.5 Validation of the linguistic and identity choice

Another challenge that Francophone and Francophile students face is whether they feel like doing additional efforts for several years, sometimes involving considerable sacrifice, in order to pursue their education in French at college or university. It is a challenge that arises only in minority settings in Ontario and that Anglophone students do not have to face.

Such deliberations are often difficult, because they involve considerations as important as cultural identity and language, but also because they include factors such as financial costs, emotional costs, and the proximity and convenience that English-language postsecondary education programs have to offer. A number of students who signed the RÉFO’s petition to reinstate the Fellowships for Studying in French program understood the scope of those deliberations for Francophones and Francophiles.<sup>25</sup>

[Translation] “The fellowship is a way of *promoting* French-language education. It’s a modest amount of money, but its symbolic capital is too great to eliminate it. The government is making a mistake that it must correct.”

— C. K., Ottawa

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<sup>24</sup> The Honourable Bob Rae, *Ontario: A Leader in Learning — Report and Recommendations*, Toronto, Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities, 2005, p. 61.

<sup>25</sup> *Supra* note 7.

[Translation] “I feel that a student who chooses to pursue a postsecondary education in French should be *encouraged*, because he’s not only facing many challenges but also helping to save an entire *identity*. That *determination* and *courage* should be strongly supported and even promoted. Reinstatement of the Fellowships for Studying in French program is absolutely necessary in order to avoid endangering Franco-Ontarian culture.”

— B. S., Hamilton

[Translation] “I’m *afraid* that if the fellowship is eliminated, Franco-Ontarians will choose English-language postsecondary education. It was an additional incentive.”

— E. A., Rockland

[Translation] “As a Franco-Ontarian high school student, I want to study in French at university, and those fellowships *encourage* us to do so.”

— A. R., Pembroke

These comments reveal a need to feel encouraged in one’s choice to pursue a postsecondary education in French. It is, after all, a matter of equality, in the true sense of the word, as defined by the Supreme Court of Canada. It is a matter of *substantive* equality as opposed to formal equality.

### 3.2.6 Substantive equality through active offer

As the Commissioner explained in his 2011-2012 Annual Report, under the principle of formal equality, everyone is treated the same.<sup>26</sup> Unfortunately, the result of this type of approach is that some groups — often minority groups — do not have the same opportunities to enjoy certain things that are

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<sup>26</sup> For more details, see [http://www.csf.gouv.on.ca/wp-content/uploads/2012/06/csf\\_report\\_en1.html](http://www.csf.gouv.on.ca/wp-content/uploads/2012/06/csf_report_en1.html) (page consulted in September 2013).

easily accessible to other groups, which are often part of a majority. Hence the importance of the concept of substantive equality, which recognizes that additional measures may sometimes be necessary to ensure actual equality of opportunities. This is the case for Francophones in Ontario: because of their minority situation, they are vulnerable to assimilation, socio-economic decline, the erosion of their heritage and numerous other threats, unless *specific* positive measures are taken to assure them of substantively equal opportunities to preserve their language, their culture and their identity.

Although the 30% Off Ontario Tuition program is available to more Francophone and Francophile students pursuing postsecondary studies in French than the Fellowships for Studying in French program was, eligibility for the reduction is based on criteria derived from the principle of formal equality rather than that of substantive equality.

Taking 30% off the tuition fees of students who meet the OSAP criteria, whether they are Francophone or Anglophone, and doing so to the detriment of the Fellowships for Studying in French program, also goes against the principle of the active offer of French-language services. “[I]n a minority context, it is the supply of educational services which creates the demand rather than the contrary.”<sup>27</sup> In light of this reverse relationship between supply and demand in the case of a linguistic minority, it is essential that access to French-language postsecondary education in Ontario be offered actively.

The active offer of French-language services requires the creation of an

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<sup>27</sup> Normand Frenette and Saeed Quazi, “Some Long Term Lessons from Minority Language Education in Ontario”, in *Canadian Journal of Higher Education*, Vol. 29, No. 1, 1999.

**environment that encourages the demand for those services and anticipation of Francophones' needs. In particular, active offer must be proactive, integrated into a universal service delivery model, and the result of a dialogue with the population being served in order to reflect its needs.** However, since the elimination of the Fellowships for Studying in French program, financial support for access to French-language postsecondary education in Ontario is no longer proactive. Rather, it is *reactive*, because the government's new financial assistance programs "target" Francophones and Francophiles only in reaction to their being qualified for OSAP and for the Travel Grant or the Commuting Grant. Thus, we find ourselves a long way from the incentive situation produced by the fellowships program, especially since the new programs are also available to Anglophone students, or to Francophone and Francophile students who choose to pursue their postsecondary education in English.

As the Commissioner stated in his *No access, no future* report, a linguistic minority often finds its voice silenced or muffled by the much louder voice of the majority. This is true for Francophones in Ontario. And this is also why linguistic minority rights exist in the first place: they represent an acknowledgement that the special status of linguistic minorities deserves additional protection. When they learned that the Fellowships for Studying in French program had been dropped, many Francophones and Francophiles immediately saw it as a loss of that kind of additional protection which was intended to recognize their unique situation and assist them directly in accessing French-language postsecondary education programs in their province. With all the different reasons that Francophone and Francophile students may have for pursuing their postsecondary education in English rather than in French in Ontario, did they really need to hear another one?

### 3.2.7 The existence of an incentive

It is all very well to say that 779 students received a Fellowship for Studying in French in 2011-2012, while 1,218 Francophone students at *La Cité collégiale* and *Collège Boréal* have already benefited from the 30% Off Ontario Tuition program for the 2012-2013 academic year. However, it is important to take a closer look at the premises of the two programs, to avoid comparing apples with oranges, so to speak. The rationale for the Fellowships for Studying in French program was to encourage Francophone and Francophile students to pursue a postsecondary education in Ontario in French. The rationale for the 30% Off Ontario Tuition program is quite different: it encourages students from lower-income families to get a postsecondary education, regardless of their language.

Before its elimination, the Fellowships for Studying in French program sent a clear signal that pursuing a postsecondary education in French was a choice encouraged by the Ontario government and, by extension, that such an education had genuine value in Ontarian society. The program was also consistent with one of the guiding principles in the Ministry's *Politique d'aménagement linguistique*, which is to "identify and address obstacles that prevent Francophone students from pursuing their studies in French." We have to face facts: the Fellowships for Studying in French program was the only governmental financial incentive designed to encourage Francophones and Francophiles to study in French in Ontario.

Instead of eliminating the Fellowships for Studying in French program outright and using the funds for the 30% Off Ontario Tuition program to justify the elimination thereafter, the Ontario government should have assessed the fellowships program's popularity and reconfigured or adjusted it on the basis of the larger number of Francophone and Francophile students now receiving financial assistance from the government, without undermining it as an incentive.

#### **4. New supports for Francophone students**

On May 13, 2013, during a visit to the University of Ottawa, the Premier of Ontario announced that effective in 2013-2014, Francophone students in Ontario who had to travel at least 80 km to do full-time studies in French would be eligible for the Ontario Distance Grant, no matter where they live in the province.

Following that announcement, the Ministry informed the Commissioner's Office that the change was not specific to programs, and that there would not be any comparison with the French-language postsecondary institution closest to the student's residence. In other words, Francophone students who travel at least 80 km to take a French-language full-time program at a publicly funded college or university will be eligible for the Ontario Distance Grant even if there is a college or university closer to their permanent home address.

The French-language postsecondary education program can be at a French-language institution (such as *Collège Boréal*), a bilingual institution (such as the University of Ottawa) or an English-language institution (for example, a major in French at the University of Waterloo).

In short, there is no distance comparison with other colleges or universities in the case of Francophone students who are

taking at least 60% of their full-time studies in French (or 40% for students with a permanent disability). This approach expands Francophone eligibility for the grant program, since Francophone students will no longer be subject to distance comparisons for French-language programs or institutions closer to their permanent residence.

For greater certainty concerning exactly what this change means, the Commissioner's Office asked the Ministry whether an OSAP-eligible student living in Sudbury who wanted to study common law at the University of Ottawa, for example, would qualify for the Ontario Distance Grant even though there are French-language post-secondary institutions within 80 km of his permanent home address, none of which offers a French-language common law program.

The Ministry replied that this was a perfect example of how eligibility for the Ontario Distance Grant had been expanded for Francophone students. The Ministry explained that in the past, an OSAP-eligible Francophone student in this situation was not eligible for the Distance Grant, since another French-language university program was available closer to his permanent home address. With the latest changes, however, that student can now obtain a Travel Grant to pursue his education in French in Ottawa or any other college or university of his choice.

## Scenario 2

*Fatima recently completed her high school education in French in Sudbury, where she lives with her parents. She is eligible for OSAP and wants to take a full-time university program in common law in French. No such program is available in French in Sudbury, but there is one at the University of Ottawa.*

*Previously, Fatima would not have been able to obtain a travel grant so that she could move to Ottawa to pursue her common law studies in French, as there is another French-language university program located closer to her family home. However, since the Premier's announcement on May 13, 2013, Fatima is now eligible for a \$300 travel grant each academic year to cover her travel costs during the four years of her program, for a total of \$1,200. This financial assistance is in addition to the 30% Off Ontario Tuition program, for which Fatima is also eligible.*

The Ministry made it clear to the Commissioner's Office that Francophone and Francophile students still had to be eligible for OSAP in order to qualify for the Ontario Distance Grant.

The OSAP application form for 2013-2014 contains a new question, which reads as follows: "Do you want to self-identify as a Francophone student?" The Ministry explained that a student is considered Francophone for OSAP eligibility purposes if his mother tongue is French, if he studied in French at the elementary or secondary level, or if he is enrolled in a postsecondary program offered at least partly in French.

A student who answers "yes" to the above question is then asked to confirm that he is studying full time in French: "Are you taking at least 60% of full-time course load in French (40% if you are a student with permanent disability)?"

Students must respond "yes" to both of these questions to be considered eligible.

They also have to satisfy the other eligibility criteria: attend a public institution in Ontario located more than 80 km from their permanent home address, and be eligible for OSAP.

The Ministry also made a commitment to the Commissioner's Office that it would actively promote the changes made in the Ontario Distance Grant program to better meet the needs of Francophone students in its initiatives to promote French-language postsecondary education, including on the French-language education website and in the information for students concerning financial assistance.

**The Commissioner congratulates the government on its decision to consider the specific needs of Francophone and Francophile students by providing them with a special incentive in the form of financial assistance, and on its commitment to promote that incentive, with the aim of supporting those students in pursuing a postsecondary education in French.**

The Commissioner is happy to have contributed, through his formal investigation, to the Ministry's deliberations and change of direction. The fact remains, of course, that students who are not eligible for OSAP and in the past could have qualified for a Fellowship for Studying in French have lost an incentive to pursue a postsecondary education in French in Ontario. **The Ministry admitted that it had not conducted any formal studies to determine whether the Fellowships for Studying in French program's initial goals and objectives had been achieved before cancelling it.** However, comprehensive consideration was given by the Ministry to determining the cost/benefit of providing more needs-based funding to Francophone students through the 30% Off Ontario Tuition grant and Ontario Distance Grant, as opposed to funding available through the Fellowships for Studying in French.

In his investigation, the Commissioner worked closely with the Ministry to obtain answers to his questions. The decision's outcome and the dynamic reaction of Ontario's Francophone population unquestionably prompted the Ministry to reconsider, *post factum*, the management and eligibility rules of its Ontario Distance Grant program, taking into account the needs of Francophone students and the incentive previously provided by the Fellowships for Studying in French program.

Certainly, the government should have considered Francophones' needs *early* in its decision-making process and in the planning process that led to the elimination of the Fellowships for Studying in French program. **In other words, it should have analyzed the impact of cancelling the program proactively instead of reactively.** It should also have identified specific measures to continue meeting a number of specific needs of Ontario's Francophone linguistic minority, including access to financial resources, solutions to the distance barrier, validation of the minority's linguistic and identity choice, attainment of substantive equality, and awareness of the existence of an incentive.

## Conclusion

Although an incentive to pursue post-secondary studies in French is essential in Ontario, that alone is not enough to overcome the inequality between the availability of French-language college and university programs in the province and the availability of English-language programs. Of course, if there are no French-language postsecondary programs that meet a student's needs, the availability of a fellowship or any other kind of financial assistance is not going to change his interests or his career plan.

### Scenario 3

*Jonathon recently completed his high school education in a French as a Second Language program in Toronto. He does not meet the eligibility criteria for OSAP. Jonathon would have liked to complete his university education in nursing in French in Toronto for two main reasons. First, he would like to have learned French nursing terminology, since he would have more career opportunities if he were fully bilingual. Second, he wants to live at home during his postsecondary studies to avoid incurring additional expenses. However, the nursing program is not offered in French in Toronto, or anywhere else in Central-Southwestern Ontario. Jonathon therefore decides to enrol in the nursing program at York University in Toronto, where he will take all of his courses in English.*

For that reason, the Commissioner reiterates the importance of implementing the recommendations in his *No access, no future* report and the recommendations made in the Expert Panel's report entitled *Moving Forward*, including the establishment of an independent secretariat to determine both the needs and the delivery of postsecondary education programs and services in Central-Southwestern Ontario.

More than one year after the publication of his *No access, no future* report, the Commissioner has yet to receive a response from the government to the report's four recommendations; he sincerely hopes that the government is taking a positive approach to each one.

Implementation of those recommendations is essential to fulfilling the vision of Ontario's *Politique d'aménagement linguistique*: "a French-language postsecondary education and training system that produces a highly educated and skilled Francophone labour force and a fully engaged Francophone community that contributes to the economic, cultural, and social development of the province and to its competitive advantage and quality of life."<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> *Supra* note 2.

## APPENDIX A

*First series of responses from the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities to questions from the Office of the French Language Services Commissioner:*

- 1. What were the goals and objectives of the Fellowships for studying in French when it was first offered in 1975-76? In eliminating the program, did the Ministry conclude that these initial goals and objectives had been met? Please share with us analysis, studies or report in the Ministry's possession, susceptible to answer this question.**

The Fellowships for Studying in French program was established to encourage Ontario residents to enter full-time post-secondary programs offered in French at French-language or bilingual institutions in Ontario or another part of Canada.

The Ministry is phasing out several OSAP programs, including Fellowships for Studying in French, effective for 2012-13. In eliminating the program, the Ministry did not conduct a formal study to determine whether the initial goals and objectives of the Fellowships for Studying in French had been met. However, the Ministry took into consideration the following factors in making the decision to eliminate the program:

- a. Student financial assistance has changed significantly since the Fellowships for Studying in French were created, with more generous OSAP assistance available today, including bursary and grant assistance.
- b. The Ministry is streamlining the student assistance program with a focus on needs-based assistance, given that merit-based institutional aid has grown substantially in the recent past. For instance, from 2000-01 to 2010-11, Ontario universities' annual expenditures for scholarships and bursaries increased from \$278 million to over \$700 million. This growth has been supported by the Ontario government through the Tuition Set-Aside Policy and the Ontario Trust for Student Support.
- c. More Francophone people will benefit from the introduction of the 30% Off Ontario Tuition Grant than the number of students who benefited from the Fellowships for Studying French. And, the total support offered through the 30% Off Ontario Tuition Grant (up to \$6,720 for a four-year university student) exceeds the value of the abolished bursary (\$1,500).
  - i. In 2011-12, 779 students received Fellowships for Studying in French.
  - ii. Since the launch of the 30% Off Ontario Tuition grant in January 2012, over 200,000 students have seen their tuition costs reduced by 30%. This number includes an estimated number of at least 2,700 Francophone students who were enrolled in full-time programs at *Collège Boréal*, *La Cité Collégiale*, University of Ottawa and Laurentian University for the 2011-2012 school year. This figure is expected to increase upon a full year of implementation in 2012-13.
- d. In 2008-2009, the Government of Ontario introduced Ontario Distance Grants to assist students from remote and rural areas with their travel costs. The Ministry took

into consideration the uniqueness of students studying in French when designing these Distance Grants. OSAP-eligible students who must commute or travel more than 80 km in order to attend programs offered in French at bilingual or French-language institutions are eligible for Distance Grants, even if there is a closer English-language institution. The Travel Grant offers \$300 per study year and the Commuting Grant provides \$500 per term of study, to a maximum of \$1,500 per study year. Over 1,300 recipients at *Collège Boréal*, *La Cité Collégiale*, University of Ottawa and Laurentian University received Ontario Distance Grants in 2011-12.

- 2. Did the Ministry conduct a specific impact analysis on its ability to reach the objectives stated in its Putting Students First Strategy as it pertains to either Francophone or Francophile students and the Postsecondary *Politique d'aménagement linguistique*? If the answer is affirmative please share with us this complete analysis.**

One of the objectives of the Putting Students First strategy is to provide extra support and encouragement to underrepresented groups, including Francophone students who want to study in French.

The Ministry's Policy Framework for French-Language Postsecondary Education and Training in Ontario - *Politique d'aménagement linguistique* (PAL) released in August 2011 enables the province to support French-language and bilingual postsecondary education institutions and employment services agencies to:

- provide greater access to French-language postsecondary education and training;
- support student participation and retention in the French-language postsecondary and training sectors; and
- improve the quality of French-language postsecondary education in Ontario.

In 2012-13, the Ministry will continue to provide \$79.7 million to fund French-Language postsecondary education, including \$12.1 million in federal support under the Official Languages in Education (OLE) program (excluding federal OLE complementary funding). A portion of this funding will support the institutional implementation of the PAL.

The Ministry will also provide nearly \$1.1 billion on student assistance programs in 2012-13, including the 30% Off Ontario Tuition grant and the Ontario Distance Grants.

- 3. Did the Ministry conduct a cost benefit analysis of the Fellowships program and a comparative analysis with the new program being in place to ascertain its validity in terms of performance measures?**

The Ministry has compared the following performance measures for the Fellowships for Studying in French and the new 30% Off Ontario Tuition Grant:

Life time support offered

- The Fellowships for Studying in French offered a one-time award of \$1,500. This is significantly less than the support offered through the 30% Off Ontario Tuition Grant. The 30% Off Ontario Tuition Grant provides \$1,680 per year to students in university or

college degree programs and \$770 per year to students in college diploma or certificate programs for up to 4 years (6 years for students with disabilities).

#### Number of students benefiting

- In 2011-12, 779 students received Fellowship for Studying in French. Since the launch of the 30% Off Ontario Tuition Grant in January 2012, over 200,000 students have seen their tuition costs reduced by 30%. The majority of the 2011-12 Fellowships for Studying in French recipients (779 students) attended French-language programs at two bilingual universities (University of Ottawa and Laurentian University) and two French-language colleges (*Collège Boréal* and *La Cité Collégiale*). At least 2,700 Francophone students at these institutions have benefited already from the introduction of the 30% Off Ontario Tuition Grant in January 2012.

#### Number of Francophone students benefiting

- As stated above, the majority of the 2011-12 Fellowships for Studying in French recipients (779 students) attended French-language programs at two bilingual universities (University of Ottawa and Laurentian University) and two French-language colleges (*Collège Boréal* and *La Cité Collégiale*). At least 2,700 Francophone students at these institutions have benefited already from the introduction of the 30% Off Ontario Tuition Grant in January 2012.

#### **4. Did the Ministry consult its stakeholders, namely the Francophone institutions, parents and student associations?**

The decision to eliminate the Fellowships for Studying in French was made as part of the 2012 Budget. Given the Government's deficit reduction goals and the new 30% Off Ontario Tuition grant, the Government decided to eliminate the following OSAP programs:

- Queen Elizabeth II Aiming for the Top Scholarships;
- Aird Scholarship;
- Sir John A. Macdonald Graduate Fellowship in Canadian History;
- Ontario-Quebec Exchange Fellowship;
- Ontario International Education Opportunity Scholarships;
- Fellowships for Studying in French;
- Textbook and Technology Grant; and
- Ontario Trust for Student Support.

This decision was a part of the Government's efforts to refocus student financial assistance on need-based aid in order to help a greater number of students and their families. As is customary for preparations of the Ontario Budget, the Ministry did not consult stakeholders prior to the Budget announcement. The Ministry has since met with stakeholders to discuss the implementation of the Budget, including representatives of Ontario's colleges, universities and student associations. The *Regroupement étudiant franco-ontarien* (RÉFO) participated in the Ministry's most recent stakeholder meeting in mid-September and had an opportunity to speak with the Minister.

- 5. Did the Ministry consider the impact on the Francophone or bilingual education institutions in terms of capacity to attract either Francophone or Francophile students who must face extra challenges related to distance and availability of programs in French as demonstrated in the Commissioner's report on postsecondary education? If so, please share with us the complete analysis. If not, please provide us with the rationale that was used for not doing so.**

The Ministry took into consideration the significant growth in government and institutional aid in arriving at its decision to eliminate the Fellowships for Studying in French, including the introduction of the 30% Off Ontario Tuition grant. The Ministry also took into consideration the supports offered to students who must travel for postsecondary studies, including Francophone students.

For example, the Ontario Student Assistance Program takes into account students' travel costs to their institutions. For students studying away from home, the cost of two round trips from their school to their home is considered in the OSAP needs assessment.

In addition, as stated earlier, the Government of Ontario introduced Ontario Distance Grants in 2008-2009 to assist students from remote and rural areas with their travel costs. Over 1,300 recipients at *Collège Boréal*, *La Cité Collégiale*, University of Ottawa and Laurentian University received Ontario Distance Grants in 2011-12.

- 6. What specific measure and/or concrete actions has the Ministry taken or is willing to take to redress the situation? Please share with us any action plan and timelines including milestones for such measures, if any are being considered. If not, would the Ministry be willing to consider such as possibility, in the affirmative, please provide us with all pertinent information.**

As part of the implementation of the postsecondary *Politique d'aménagement linguistique* (PAL), the Ministry is exploring a variety of mechanisms to improve student access to French-language courses, programs, research and/or training experiences at the college, undergraduate, master's and doctoral level by supporting student mobility. The partner institutions of the PAL will be invited to help identify strategies to increase learning opportunities, student mobility and professional development for Ontario's Francophones.

## APPENDIX B

*Second series of responses from the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities to questions from the Office of the French Language Services Commissioner following the announcement by the Premier of Ontario on making Ontario's Francophone students eligible for the Ontario Distance Grant:*

1. **In its present form the Ontario Distance Grant for either travel or for commuting specifies that to be considered for this grant, the student must have a permanent address that is 80 kilometers or more from the closest public Ontario postsecondary institution of the type attended.**

**Pursuant to the modifications announced by the Premier on May 14, 2013 will the specifications be modified to state that the student must have a permanent address that is 80 kilometers or more from the closest public French-language postsecondary institution of the type attended? Or, will the modifications be program specific?**

**Example:**

**Will a student living in Sudbury, wishing to study the program of Common Law in French offered by the University of Ottawa, qualify for this aid even though there are French-language postsecondary institutions available at less than 80 kilometers from his home address, although none that offers the Common Law program?**

The change is not program specific, nor will there be comparisons to the closest French-language postsecondary institution. Francophone students who commute or travel at least 80 kilometres to attend a full-time French-language program at an Ontario publicly-assisted college or university, regardless of whether there is a closer college or university to their permanent home address, will be eligible for the Distance Grant.

The French-language program may be at a French-language institution (e.g., *Collège Boréal*), a bilingual institution (e.g., University of Ottawa) or an English-language institution (e.g., French major at University of Waterloo).

In short, there is no distance comparison to other colleges or universities in the case of Francophone students who take at least 60% of full-time studies in French (40% for a student with a permanent disability). This approach expands the eligibility for this grant to Francophone students as they will no longer be subject to the distance comparison for closer French-language programs and institutions. (For non-Francophone students, a comparison will continue to be made to identify whether a closer institution is available.)

The example provided above, of a student from Sudbury who attends the Common Law program in French at University of Ottawa, illustrates how eligibility for the grant is being expanded. Prior to this change, this student would not have qualified because another French-language university program was located closer to his home. With the changes, however, this student can now receive the travel grant towards his French-language studies in Ottawa or at another university or college of his choice.

2. **Will this grant be offered to all students wishing to study in French and having a permanent address that exceeds 80 kilometers from the closest French-language postsecondary institutions of the type attended, regardless of their admissibility to the Ontario Student Assistance Program (OSAP)?**
3. **Or, will this grant be offered to all students wishing to study in French and having a permanent address that exceeds 80 kilometers from the closest French-language postsecondary institution of the type attended offering the program of study of their choice, regardless of their admissibility to the Ontario Student Assistance Program (OSAP)?**

Students must still be eligible for OSAP in order to qualify for the Ontario Distance Grants. More specifically, they must qualify for Ontario assistance under the OSAP needs assessment in order to receive an Ontario Distance Grant (i.e., have at least one dollar of need when comparing their costs to their resources). Students who only qualify for Canada assistance under the OSAP needs assessment are not eligible for Ontario Distance Grants.

The 2013-14 OSAP application includes a new question, "Do you want to self-identify as a Francophone student?" A student is considered a Francophone student if their mother tongue is French; or they studied in French at the elementary or secondary level; or they are/were enrolled in a postsecondary program offered at least partially in French.

If students answer yes to above question, they are asked to confirm that they are studying full-time in French: "Are you taking at least 60% of full-time course load in French (40% if you are a student with permanent disability)?"

Students must answer yes to both questions to be considered eligible. They must also meet the other eligibility criteria, namely studying at a public institution in Ontario more than 80 kilometres from their permanent home address and qualifying for Ontario assistance under the OSAP need assessment.

4. **In the case of a student receiving this type of grant, will the monetary value be included in his assessment to qualify for OSAP, or be deducted from any monies available through OSAP?**

The Ontario Distance Grant will not displace loan or grant funding available to the student through OSAP. It will be issued to qualifying students in addition to their OSAP entitlements so as to provide additional funds to the student.

5. **Is the Ministry willing to actively promote this new Ontario Distance Grant to Study in French and post the relevant information in the section of its website titled *Studying in French* instead of including it only with other types of grants or loans available under the OSAP section?**

MTCU will actively promote this program as part of its initiatives to promote French language postsecondary education, including on the *Study in French* website and with the information available on student financial assistance. MTCU will also promote the program with its French-language and bilingual stakeholders.

**6. Will the distance grant be renewable on a yearly or semester basis as the case may be, for the entire duration and for all levels of postsecondary education in French, ranging from a college certificate to a postdoctoral degree?**

Students must meet the eligibility criteria in each year they apply for OSAP to be eligible for this grant. There are two distinct Distance Grants: 1) Commuting Grant; 2) Travel Grant, each with different eligibility.

- 1) For the Commuting Grant, the general eligibility requirements are that the student be a dependent (less than 4 years out of high school) or independent student living at home with his/her parents during the study period; married student or in a common-law relationship, or sole support parent. So provided that criterion is met, the student could receive the Commuting Grant through all degrees of study.
- 2) For the Travel Grant, the general eligibility requirements are that the student be a dependent (less than 4 years out of high school) student living away from home during the study period. As only dependent students receive this grant, it is unlikely that doctoral or graduate students would be eligible.

**7. Considering the limited number of programs of study and courses available in French, a student may be forced by circumstances to take courses in English in the same bilingual institution to complete his program requirements. Will special provisions be made to address this issue specifically and make sure that he is not penalized for a situation over which he has no control?**

Part of the rationale for this new program is to support the travel and commuting costs of Francophone students to pursue studies in French. Students are asked to respond to the question: "Are you taking at least 60% of full-time course load in French (40% if you are a student with permanent disability)?" If they do not answer yes to this question, they would not be eligible for the grant. However, this would still allow students to take courses in English as part of their program.