

Update from the *regroupements*



Regroupement *université*

Sylvain Marois, FNEEQ Vice-president

Higher Education Minister H el ene David's proposal for setting up a council of universities has been met with some trepidation by the *Regroupement universit e*. While our member unions generally support the idea of creating an advisory body, this would have to be done with a view to promoting an open, democratic and accessible university system in Qu ebec in partnership with the university community. But since the content of the Minister's consultation document falls considerably short of our expectations, FNEEQ and other university labour organizations have come up with eight key principles of consensus¹ that should guide the creation of a Qu ebec council of universities.

The *Regroupement's* unions have been working on a report on current practices in Distance Learning (DL). In many universities, if not the majority of them, DL is seen as the future of education. At Universit e Laval, for instance, the administration is looking to translate its DL interface in order to export its know-how. This is all about exporting a *business* model, and doing so in the name of profit rather than of the creation and dissemination of knowledge! Collectively, we need to give thought to distance learning in relation to intellectual property rights, resale rights, compensation, number of students and a host of other issues to be able to better frame our collective agreements. To do this, we intend to consult with course lecturers engaged in distance learning by conducting discussion groups and surveys, all under the coordination of a committee of experts in the field. This exercise will culminate in a reflection day on the issue, which we hope to hold in winter 2017.

Another matter of key interest around the negotiating table is that of annual status. This refers to course lecturers who have a full-time teaching load and a contract of more than a year (often renewable). Whereas this situation may create a certain sense of job stability for some, it can also have various adverse effects on others. A *Regroupement* committee has been working intensely to draw up a portrait of the situation by analyzing the reality in several universities and comparing the different collective agreements for course lecturers. The committee's report is expected to be submitted shortly to the *Regroupement* and the FNEEQ team.

With the help of experts from the CSN's SRT division, the *Regroupement universit e* has now carried out a comparative salary analysis that will serve as a key tool in determining the wage gap between a course lecturer giving a class and a professor (of comparable status) giving a class. Our main goal, as outlined in our platform of common demands, is to reduce that gap. Each union is free to tackle this challenge as it sees fit during bargaining.

Two other important issues are also on the work table: the transformation of governance and the toughening of labour relations. It is no great secret that since the mid-90s, the administration of our universities has shifted from a collegial to a more managerial approach. *Regroupement* delegates want to see the situation reviewed and a position developed to counter this movement, whose business-oriented slant is largely blamed for the increasingly contentious labour relations and growing presence of lawyers around the bargaining table. This is a complex situation that requires thorough consideration of a great many factors. FNEEQ's advisors will be helping us reflect on these.

It is against this difficult backdrop that we are accompanying the SCCUQ and SCCUM in their long and arduous negotiations. Despite a few positive inroads, the salary proposals from management are wholly insufficient, if not downright insulting. The union representing Concordia University course lecturers, for its part, is working hard to salvage whatever it can, particularly on the pension plan front. Here again, FNEEQ's advisors, with the help of CSN actuaries, are doing everything in their power to support the union. Let's hear it for solidarity!

Is that enough?

At their annual assembly of November 26, the lecturers of UQAM overwhelmingly rejected the employer's final offer by 96.5%, while 86% of the members present voted in favour of a strike mandate of five consecutive days, to be exercised when deemed necessary. The negotiation talks have been taken place over 17 months, at an excruciatingly slow pace.² ■

Solidarity!

1 http://fneeq.qc.ca/wp-content/uploads/cuq_fr.pdf.

2 <http://fneeq.qc.ca/fr/les-chargees-et-chargees-de-cours-de-luqam-rejettent-loffre-finale/>.



Regroupement *privé*

Caroline Quesnel, FNEEQ Vice-presidente

After an intense period of unionization from 2012-2015, during which the Regroupement privé welcomed 11 new member unions, this last year has been marked by the wrap-up of a series of first negotiations: this was the case for the unions representing two schools in the Pessamit Innu community, Collège Jean de La Mennais, Marianopolis College and the Centre de musique et de danse de Val-d'Or. In virtually all of these negotiations, conciliation was needed to reach an agreement due to management's unwillingness to bargain. In the end, all four unions were able to negotiate collective agreements that substantially improve working conditions for their members. The Federation is elated by this outcome, which speaks volumes on the collective power to effect change.

There is no question that 2016-2017 is going to be a "big" bargaining year: more than half of the Regroupement's members—or nearly 2,500 teachers and staff in private schools affiliated with FNEEQ—will be coming up for contract renewal. With that

in mind, the coordination team began taking advantage of last year's regular meetings to offer delegates a series of condensed training sessions in the form of workshops: one last February on the "Labour Relations Committee," another, in April, on being a "Member of the Board of Governors," and two more coming up this winter on "Mobilization" and "Information on Social Networks." Geared to the specific needs of the *Regroupement*, this formula is particularly popular with delegates, who have limited leave for union activities, and fosters discussion and information sharing.

Since negotiation is at the centre of the *Regroupement's* discussions and deliberations, the coordination team believes the conditions are ripe for launching a concerted bargaining pilot project similar—albeit on a smaller scale—to the one in the *Regroupement université*. This proposal has been met with interest by advisors and members alike, and we hope to get the project under way this winter with two advisors and four unions that will be launching negotiations within the next two years. ■



Regroupement *cégep*

Nicole Lefebvre, FNEEQ Vice-presidente

Higher education has been under the spotlight this fall with the government's launch of consultations on the plan to create two councils and a joint commission and to amend Québec's college education regulations, the *Règlement sur le régime des études collégiales* (RREC). The Regroupement cégep reviewed these projects and gave its input on the content of the joint briefs submitted by the CSN and FNEEQ, FEESP and FP. The wording of the ministerial document particularly irked the delegates of the *Regroupement*, who objected to the pervasive use of performance-based language woven through such notions as quality assurance, ongoing improvement and the search for best practices. As open as the *Regroupement cégep* is to the creation of a place that can foster greater partnership and cohesiveness among colleges as well as universities, it does not support this being done in a way that subjugates higher education to a mercantile or managerial conception of education.

Another key issue this fall has been the local distribution of the additional resources secured during the last round of bargaining to support the success of students with disabilities. A survey of *Regroupement unions* reveals that representatives of the *Fédération des cégeps* and many college administrations persist in misinterpreting the purpose of these resources and are consequently delaying their allocation. They appear to be relying on the argument that the financial appendix stipulating how these resources are to be used is still being drafted by the ministry to justify an interpretation that in no way reflects the spirit of the talks held with the college management negotiating committee (CPNC) during the negotiations. Actions have been taken on both the local and provincial levels to rectify the situation as soon as possible and to get concrete recognition for the role that teachers play in ensuring the success of this student population.

Lastly, the *Regroupement* has been advised of the changes that could be made to the various programs currently under provincial review, such as the pre-university programs in Natural Science, Computer Science and Math, Science, Literature and Art, and Social Science. It is critical that teachers in the disciplines concerned are consulted and given the opportunity to provide their opinions on any changes that may affect them. ■