

Foreign student interns Welcome to Canada!

In February 2015, a serious matter was referred to FNEEQ by one of its member unions concerning foreign students who come to our colleges to do an internship in Quebec. At issue is an amendment to Citizenship and Immigration Canada's International Mobility Program—made smack-dab in the middle of the academic year—that modifies the status of foreign interns to reclassify them as foreign workers, even though they are unpaid. It is a change that threatens the very future of foreign student internships!

Sébastien Brousseau
Assistant coordinator - Regroupement cégep

This decision is not inconsequential. First of all, it makes it more complicated to obtain visas for the visiting interns, the majority of whom are from France. It also has a very real impact on the CEGEPs themselves, in that it jeopardizes their partnerships and exchange agreements with France's *Instituts Universitaires de Technologie* (IUT), as well as with the businesses and research centres that have been offering internship opportunities to these students for years.

In some colleges, internships represent the same workload whether they are for a foreign student or a Quebec student: the teacher is still responsible for finding them an on-the-job placement, as well as for supervising and evaluating them. It is no surprise that this change

is causing major headaches for a good many departments.

FNEEQ made representations to elected officials in Quebec and Ottawa—and more pointedly to federal Immigration Minister Chris Alexander—to have the internships between Quebec CEGEPs and France's IUTs exempted from this change on the grounds that these interns are not paid and should therefore not be lumped in with foreign workers. The most pressing concern in the short term was to secure an immediate reprieve for the CEGEP internships already planned for the year in progress. Against all logic, the ministry has refused to budge and is maintaining that the program change will continue to apply in

the same way to student interns as it does to foreign workers.

CSN will be taking up the cause once again with Ottawa in an effort to explain the need for an exemption for foreign interns under the IMP, which contains a provision that allows for such a possibility “where there are reciprocal and significant benefits for Canadians and other competitive advantages for Canada.”

Will we have a more attentive ear in Ottawa after the October election? ■

