

Situation Analysis : Summary

Negotiation 2015



May 2014

Introduction

In this lead-up to the next round of public sector negotiations, we will soon be relaunching the exercise to define our objectives by drafting our list of sectoral demands. To that end, an analysis of the prevailing social and political situation and of various recent developments in higher education is important in helping us identify the main issues and challenges. This exercise will also allow us to properly orient our strategy for putting forth our demands and having them reflected in our next collective agreement. This document is a summary of the *Situation Analysis* posted in its full version on the FNEEQ Website at

http://fneeq.qc.ca/en/cegep/Negotiations/Negotiations-2015/2014-05-13 - Situation_Analysis_version_finale_xANGx.pdf

I- Social and political context

2012 student strike

If we look back at the social and political situation in Quebec with regard to education, there is no doubt that the 2012 student strike stands out as a pivotal and defining event. The student movement catapulted education to the forefront of Quebec politics with its unprecedented mobilization in the face of the Charest government's obstinate refusal to listen and the string of confrontations with police. It was also the first large-scale social movement in the province to make such extensive use of social media. The student strike culminated in a measure of victory: the cancellation of the Liberals' planned tuition hike.

Liberal's return to power

Until this spring, the Parti Québécois formed a minority government, with the QLP and CAQ—two right-of-centre parties—holding the balance of power. The April 7th election resulted in the election of a Liberal majority government, which walked away with 70 of the 125 available seats. There is good reason to fear that the issues affecting CEGEPs and universities may not be a top priority for the new government, particularly in light of the premier's campaign promise of \$1.3 billion in cuts to Quebec's bureaucracy over two years.¹

Summit on Higher Education

The Marois government created the Ministry of Higher Education and held a Summit on Higher Education in Montréal on February 25 and 26, 2013. The summit concluded with the government setting up five task forces² on the future of higher education, only one of which concerns college teaching and has to do with the education offering. The task force is to table its final report in June 2014.

¹ La Presse canadienne, "Services publics – Coupes : les syndicats veilleront au grain," *Le Devoir*, April 10, 2014.

² The five task forces are: legislation regarding universities, the Council on Universities, CEGEP training, university funding, and student financial aid.

Symposium on the development of CEGEPs in the regions

Another important event that brought together a large number of stakeholders from the college sector was the symposium held on the theme of “Quebec, equipped with a strong college system in all regions.” FNEEQ took the initiative to organize this symposium in Jonquière in April 2013, with the collaboration of FEC and the *Fédération des cégeps*.

The event helped shed light on a number of important findings about training programs in regular education, continuing education, student mobility and funding. Among other things, problems were noted with the program optimization plan, which calls for the creation of generic programs of questionable relevance and efficacy, leading FNEEQ to conclude the need for province-wide management of the CEGEP program roadmap. Also identified was the need to curb competition with the private college system, as was seen with Jonquière’s Media Arts and Technology program. One of proposed solutions, garnering the support of both the *Fédération des cégeps* and FNEEQ, is that the enrolment-based funding formula be the same in continuing education as in regular education.

II- State of the situation in the college sector

Continuing education and the recognition of acquired competencies

A joint report from the national meeting committee (CNR) shows that course lecturers in continuing education perform virtually the same tasks as teachers in regular education but are neither properly recognized nor compensated for these duties. Yet within the context of the recognition of acquired competencies (RAC), there exists wide disparity in the working conditions of course lecturers in continuing education and regular teaching staff from one institution to the next. In this regard, it is urgent that the role of teachers as content specialists be clarified. Lecturing teachers in continuing education are victims of unfair treatment and have been forced into a situation of job precarity that must be rectified.

Status report from the task force on CEGEP training

The status report from the task force on CEGEP training, or Demers Report, takes particular interest in the future of regional CEGEPs in view of the projected decline in the student population, recommending diversified training and a minimum educational curriculum for each college and underscoring the importance of keeping low-enrolment programs open that correspond to a need in the labour market. FNEEQ generally agrees with these proposals but insists that the decision to open and close study programs must not be made solely on the basis of short-term economic cycles. Contrary to FNEEQ’s opinion, the Demers Report also recommends the “deployment of distance training throughout the CEGEP system for basic and continuing education”³ and suggests a mandate be given for the next collective agreement negotiation with teachers to “facilitate the deployment of the various modes of distance education [...]”⁴. We worry there may be an underlying desire in this vision to fragment the teaching workload and limit professional autonomy.

The calling into question of CEGEP study programs

The search for solutions to ensure the viability of the college system is made all the more relevant by the recent calling into question of certain college study programs, notably Nursing, Early Childhood Education

³ Guy Demers, *Rapport d'étape du chantier sur l'offre de formation collégiale*, January 2014, p. 76.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 77.

and Ocular Prosthesis Technology. One of the reasons for this is that the Quebec college system is unique and its diplomas are often compared to their secondary or university equivalents elsewhere in the world. Furthermore, some employer groups looking to cut labour costs have been advocating for greater recognition of the competencies acquired by high school technical graduates. Thought needs to be given to the role of CEGEP teachers in eventual sector-based studies and to solutions like establishing a provincial committee for each technical program, including in contributive disciplines, or a council similar to the one planned for universities.

Students with disabilities

One of the concerns frequently raised during the bargaining committee's tour of the unions was, without question, the impact of the rising number of students with disabilities (SWD)⁵ on teacher workload. The right to education also means the right of every student to benefit from the kind of support that allows them to develop skills and knowledge to the fullest of their potential, without lowering the educational requirements. This must also translate to the classroom and be recognized in the teacher workload. The context seems favourable to developing solutions that will allow this growing reality to be taken into account in teacher workloads, not only for the sake of our own professional recognition but also in the name of the right of all to have access to quality public services, including in education.

Workload and resources

Members also voiced a number of concerns about workload. The last round of bargaining talks secured the addition of 430 full-time equivalents (FTEs) over five years to teaching, 403 of them to type 1 of the workload. A large proportion of these new resources were allocated to student support and supervision, improving the eligibility criteria under Budget Schedule S-026 for programs with small cohorts, offsetting the overload associated with clinical teaching in Nursing, and course preparation, notably in Music.

The main issues regarding teaching resources for the next round of negotiations therefore centre mainly on the growing number of students with disabilities in colleges, the heavy demands of work correction and course preparation, and the proliferation of internships in the CEGEP system. To that end, FNEEQ's long-standing demand that the allocation of teaching resources be tied to the amount of work to be performed is more pressing than ever. The system of allocating teaching resources on the basis of program-slopes, as is currently the case, needs to be changed.

Lastly, in terms of workload and resources, the application of the present collective agreement has also clearly shown a lack of transparency in the submission of the allocation plan and report on resource use that must be rectified.

Job precarity

In the upcoming bargaining talks, securing better working conditions for those with the greatest precarity—namely course lecturers in continuing education—will be one of our priorities. Precarity is also a problem for contingent teachers in regular education, who for the last 15 years or more have accounted for about 40% of the teaching staff. What can be done to stabilize the jobs of contract teachers who have more than five years' seniority and whose workload will never reach full-time status? Can we improve their access to the various leaves? Can we clarify the moment from which a teacher is under contract with the college? These are a few of the many questions we will need to debate in drawing up our list of demands.

⁵ "Students With Disabilities" (SWD) now replaces the previously-used term of "Special-needs Students".

Reconciliation of family-work-training

How much priority will we assign to the family-work-training balance in our upcoming list of demands? In the previous negotiations, we secured an improvement in leaves of absence for family reasons at the central bargaining table. Is there a way to further require colleges to grant schedule accommodations or part-time leave to parents with young or disabled children? Can the same benefits be extended to an employee caring for a sick loved one or continuing their studies? In addition to the leave granted to pursue a master's degree, could we also have access to leave to obtain a doctorate?

College research

Another issue that emerged from the general assembly tour was the hope that research would be given a greater role in colleges in the coming years. Considering that education is the primary mission of CEGEPs, maintaining close ties between teaching and research, particularly in the case of college technology transfer centres (CCTT), is essential to ensure that any research conducted fully benefits the CEGEPs, their departments and their students. This cannot be done without a willingness to harmonize the grants and leaves in our collective agreement. Moreover, to preserve the quality of education, adequate funding for research must be provided without cutting in to the budget for teaching. Lastly, all forms of research must be encouraged to ensure the commodification of education does not take primacy over the social mission of the research.

The CEEC and quality assurance

Since 2012, the *Commission d'évaluation de l'enseignement collégial* (CEEC) has taken on a new mission: getting colleges to implement a quality assurance process and then assessing it. FNEEQ sees this as a meta-evaluation with little or no real concern for the quality of study programs. Added to this is the multiplication of approvals and accreditations required for many technical programs that significantly impede the functioning of departments and programs. By imposing their criteria and standards, these external agencies are bypassing the mechanisms provided for in the collective agreement and eroding the professional autonomy not only of teachers, but also of the departments and program committees that serve as the very guarantors of quality. Rather than heaping on more bureaucracy and meta-evaluations, we should be considering ways to strengthen the college system, such as by setting up provincial program committees made up mostly of teachers, including from contributive disciplines, or perhaps by doing away with the CEEC entirely and replacing it with a national council of college study programs.

Occupational health and safety

While quality of education must be one of our concerns, so must the quality of the workplace and the importance of creating a healthy work environment. We are no strangers to the fact that, for many years, teachers have been faced with difficult work conditions and that this can have a serious impact on health, particularly on mental health. This situation must be addressed in the next round of negotiations, both in terms of prevention and of the conditions surrounding invalidity and the return to work.

Hiring outlook

Over the past few years, the college network has hired a large number of teachers due to a high level of retirement and a rise in student enrolment. Government projections on student enrolment until 2018 and statistics on the age of teaching staff in the college system suggest that the expected decline in enrolment, as a percentage, should roughly match that of the anticipated departures due to retirement. As the percentage of departures through retirement is basically equivalent to the projected drop in enrolment, we

can expect very little hiring over the next few years, which could result in continued job precarity for those already in that position.

Salary relativity and the master's-doctoral echelons

During the last round of bargaining talks, FNEEQ affirmed that the low remuneration CEGEP teachers receive compared to other jobs requiring equivalent levels of education was making it difficult to attract and retain candidates to the profession. The reviews under way on salary relativity and the master's-doctoral echelons could help remedy this situation. The Treasury Board must now be led to fully recognize our role in higher education by raising us above rank 22, notably because of our autonomy, the complexity of the concepts we are teaching and the scope of responsibility of CEGEP departments and program committees. Ideally, an agreement with the government on both the issues of salary relativity and the master's-doctoral echelons will be reached before the start of the new contract negotiations.

III- Elements of a strategic framework

CPNC sectoral issues

Judging from the recent positions taken by its representatives, we can expect the CPNC to promote the internationalization of Quebec education as a means of countering the projected decline in the student population. We also expect it may want more emphasis placed on teleteaching. At the symposium on the development of CEGEPs in the regions, a number of administrators voiced their support for better working conditions for teachers in the continuing education sector. This was best summed up in the request that funding associated with student enrolment in the continuing education stream be the same as it is regular education, which would greatly facilitate the integration of the two sectors. Careful attention must also be paid to the *Fédération des cégeps'* recent and marked interest in universal teaching, an idea on which FNEEQ has expressed reservations. Increased funding for research activities may also be an issue on the table.

Bargaining results and timetable

Whereas in the last public sector negotiations the Common Front was eager to reach a speedy settlement, the focus for this coming round of bargaining talks will be to achieve a satisfactory outcome, ideally within a short enough time frame to avoid the threat of an imposed decree or the denial of a retroactive pay raise.

The Common Front partners' bargaining timetables also need to be well coordinated in order to prevent the government from resorting to its usual June 24th or December 24th signing strategy. Mechanisms for rapid consultation must be put in place if we are to be able to take diligent action at the conclusion of the negotiations.

Alliances

The *Regroupement cégep* came out in favour of building the broadest possible coalition for the upcoming bargaining round, and this ultimately panned out with the joining together of the CSN, FTQ and SISF in the Common Front. As for sectoral alliances, talks are currently under way with FEC on the possibility of joint action.

Communications plan

While the Common Front's communication strategy is not yet known, we saw a little preview of the CSN's approach with its "*Merci à vous*" campaign. The CSN has also put an information and mobilization structure

in place on Facebook that calls on the participation of local action and information head officers (RELAIS) and union operations head officers (RESO). On the sectoral level, the first stage is nearly complete with the training session on negotiation and the tour of local unions. In parallel, the bargaining committee is working on a communication strategy that will help rally teachers around our demands.

IV- Mobilization outlook

The communications plan will also serve to build and sustain mobilization; a show of strength provides bargaining leverage. Last fall's solidarity over the salary relativity issue, with *Operation Distruption 21*, bodes well for a strong show of support for the next round of negotiations. The 2012 student strike proved that Quebec society is ready to pull together and support a movement that seeks better access to quality public services. If our mobilization is strong from the outset, we may be able to generate that same kind of public support for our cause. And lastly, the Common Front, whose membership was announced this past March 16th, gives us the strength in numbers we need—with more than 400,000 public sector employees—to be ready for the next round of collective bargaining.

Conclusion

The force of our numbers and the experiences of recent events leave us optimistic as to the ability of FNEEQ members to mobilize for the defence not only of their own rights as workers, but also of the broader rights of all to receive quality public services. To succeed, we are going to have to rally together and send a clear message that we intend to remain firm until the end.