

CIRANO note based on a report by Louis Maheu and Robert Lacroix, April 2012

In this paper we wish to share some thoughts on quality assurance—without necessarily providing an exhaustive survey of this vast issue—and propose the creation of a Quebec higher education and academic research council.

A significant increase in the international mobility of university students, the generally high cost of studying abroad, and a domestic and international market for university reputation have all created an urgent need for information on the quality of universities.

However, two elements must feature in any discussion of the processes and methods underlying an adequate quality assurance program for an academic system, in particular Quebec's. First, while bearing in mind the differentiated missions of these member institutions, we need to identify and establish the exact level of quality that is relevant to our society and knowledge-based economy and that each and every university must attain. Second, these institutions must receive the necessary resources and incentives, also as determined by their various missions, to actually reach the selected quality level.

Any attempt to directly overlay the current academic scene with a national quality assurance system—which would probably have to be at minimal cost—seems highly inappropriate to us. We need a broader perspective and more long-term vision. Therefore, we must adopt the tools to do it right.

Quebec needs to create a dedicated and independent research, evaluation, and information agency devoted to academic research and teaching: to wit, a higher education and academic research council. The mission of this council would cover three broad aspects. A **research and advisory aspect** on the development of Quebec's university system in the domestic and international environment would address the issues of the desired quality level, the required funding, diversification of revenue sources, performance incentives, etc. This aspect would also involve a comprehensive and essential monitoring function. An **evaluation and quality assurance aspect** would allow the multidimensional target set by the quality assurance process to be met; and a **data and specialized information bank** would ensure that the quality assurance process and the orientations of Quebec's university system are supported by reliable data that are constantly updated and well suited to informed decision making.

This council will safeguard the autonomy of the scrutinized universities and guide discussions on the missions of universities, the required financing level, and the appropriate revenue sources.

The full study (French only) is available on CIRANO's Website at:

<http://www.cirano.qc.ca/pdf/publication/2012DT-02.pdf>