



Chambre de commerce
du Montréal métropolitain
Board of Trade of Metropolitan Montreal

August 7, 2009

Yolande James
Minister of Immigration and Cultural Communities
Minister's Cabinet
Gérald-Godin Building
360 McGill Street, 4th Floor
Montréal, Quebec H2Y 2E9

**Subject: Comments on the *Programme de l'expérience québécoise* for
selecting foreign nationals**

Dear Madam Minister:

The Board of Trade of Metropolitan Montreal has noted with interest the changes to the immigration programs announced in June by the Ministère de l'Immigration et des Communautés culturelles (MICC) and would like to make a few comments in this regard.

We understand that the Programme de l'expérience québécoise (PEQ) is intended to speed up the immigration process for foreign students who have completed a high-school vocational, college technical or university program in a Quebec institution and for specialized temporary workers who have worked in Quebec for a total of 12 months in the last 24 months. We also understand that in both cases, applicants must demonstrate an intermediate knowledge of French in order to obtain the Quebec Selection Certificate (QSC) allowing them to establish permanent residency in the province.

The Board of Trade would like to commend the government for this initiative. In our view, it is absolutely essential for the economic future of the metropolis and of Quebec to make it easier for foreign students and specialized workers interested in remaining in Quebec to become permanent residents.

However, given the stiff competition for talent in North America and the fact that Quebec needs to increasingly look beyond its borders for qualified workers, the Board of Trade questions the relevance of making intermediate knowledge of French a selection criterion.

The Board of Trade feels that we must do everything in our power to ensure that high-level talent perceive Montréal and Quebec as welcoming places with minimal obstacles to establishing residency. In our view, foreign students and specialized workers, who often have a plethora of choices as to where to live, should not be constrained by this linguistic requirement at a critical time of their careers. Rather, we believe a more proactive approach is in order; namely, to offer highly subsidized courses to help them learn French before they become residents.

Rationale for the Board of Trade's position

According to current data, within the next few years, net labour force growth will be entirely fuelled by immigration. Attracting and retaining foreign talent is therefore critical for the future of Quebec and its metropolis.

Indeed, since the publication of its 2005 *Health Report* on attracting, training and retaining the best talents, the Board of Trade has been stressing the importance of adopting measures to lure to and keep a larger pool of foreign talent in Montréal.

This study showed that notwithstanding its enviable quality of life, Montréal does not attract as many graduate immigrants as a city of its size and stature should. Although 15,000 foreign students choose to study in Montréal, all too many leave the province right after graduation despite having had the chance to become familiar with the Quebec way of life and build a social network. These graduates are well positioned to quickly find jobs, unimpeded by the degree recognition problems usually faced by immigrants.

Fast tracking the best talent is the way to go

The changes proposed by the MICC concretely address Quebec's need for qualified labour and will help improve our demographic situation. We believe that if implemented, the proposed fast tracking will significantly increase the number of high-level immigrants in Quebec.

By granting a Quebec Selection Certificate to foreign students who graduate from a Quebec educational institution and to specialized temporary workers, the MICC is recognizing the value of Quebec experience gained by these candidates and greatly simplifies their selection process.

This measure is all the more relevant in the current economic context where talented individuals are highly mobile and North American cities are fiercely vying to attract and retain them. In this regard, the MICC approach is highly proactive.

For this reason, the Board of Trade is pleased to see that the MICC intends to actively promote the PEQ.

Make Francization an added value rather than an obstacle

While the Board of Trade believes in the importance of preserving the French language in Quebec, we question the relevance of requiring international students and temporary foreign workers to have an intermediate knowledge of French in order to remain in Quebec.

If applied to the letter, such a measure could well deprive the province of qualified workers who are already familiar with our way of life and who wish to make Quebec their home. Some of these individuals may not have had extensive exposure to the French language during their stay. In our view, this is not sufficient reason to eliminate them from the fast-tracking process.

We believe that the Quebec culture and French language are in and of themselves a source of pride and a powerful integrative force for immigrants and their children. Individuals who

choose to study or work in Quebec and who subsequently wish to stay should not have additional requirements imposed on them.

Instead, we think that measures should be implemented to help potential immigrants learn French before obtaining residency. That's why we strongly recommend that the MICC improve the Francization offer by, for example, providing access to French classes on campus or near workplaces.

In this way, potential immigrants would have the necessary resources available to them to develop their knowledge of the language without jeopardizing their ability to remain in Quebec.

The Board of Trade's contribution

Although Quebec must boost its immigration rate, it faces major hurdles on the integration front. Consequently, we consider it essential that efforts to increase immigration include a broad-based increase in the resources offered to new arrivals.

In this regard, the Board of Trade is pleased to work together with the MICC to offer mini traineeships to qualified immigrants as part of our three-year *World on Our Doorstep* program. The Board of Trade is also working with the Ministère as part of the *French in the Workplace* program, spreading the word to business owners about the free French courses available to employees and helping them set up the program in their workplace. Both initiatives are part of a collective will to ensure the speedy, permanent integration of immigrant workers into the labour force.

Conclusion

The Board of Trade would like to commend the MICC for its efforts to fast track the immigration process for foreign students and specialized temporary workers. The proposed changes are both significant and necessary. However, we reiterate our concern with respect to the pre-requisite intermediate knowledge of French. Mindful that Quebec immigration is an important and challenging issue, we are available to discuss how the Board of Trade and the metropolitan business community can do more in this regard.

Sincerely,

Michel Leblanc
President and CEO