



Alliance de recherche  
universités-communautés  
Innovations, travail et emploi

## STUDY ON THE STATUS OF RESEARCH PROFESSIONALS IN UNIVERSITIES AND AFFILIATED RESEARCH CENTRES

# Highlights

*With a participation rate of over 45%, research professionals*  
**CONFIRMED THE NEGATIVE EFFECTS OF JOB INSECURITY.**

## *Partners* IN THE STUDY

Syndicat des professionnelles et des professionnels de recherche de l'Université Laval (SPPRUL-CSQ)

Fédération du personnel professionnel des universités et de la recherche (FPPU) et ses syndicats affiliés

Syndicat des employé(e)s de la recherche de l'Université de Montréal – Public Service Alliance of Canada (SERUM-AFPC)

In March 2013, the SPPRUL-CSQ, a federation of union groups representing research professionals (PPR - professionnelles et professionnels de recherche) met to respond to a request to study the working conditions of research professionals in universities and research centres across Québec. The request was financed in part by Chief scientist of Québec, Rémi Quirion.

Professor Paul-André Lapointe from the Université Laval led the research and Chedli Baya Chatti, also from the Université Laval, was responsible for the study's operational mandate.

## Highlights

The study was conducted in May 2013, with research professionals from the following universities and research centres:

- Université Laval
- Université de Montréal
- Université du Québec à Montréal
- Université de Sherbrooke
- Université du Québec à Trois-Rivières
- Université du Québec à Chicoutimi
- Université du Québec en Outaouais
- Université du Québec en Abitibi-Témiscamingue
- Centre de recherche du CHU
- Centre de recherche sur le vieillissement de l'Université Sherbrooke

### *Profile of research professionals*

- More than 2500 francophone research professionals (PPR) in Québec universities and affiliated centres were asked to complete the questionnaire.
- Over 45.9% of the professionals asked took part in the study, 60% of them were women.
- 28.8% of the women work in sciences and engineering, 37.2% are in the field of human and social sciences, 23.6% are in health sciences, and 3% of these women are researchers in the field of administrative sciences.
- PPRs consist of a young population in terms of their ages and years of service. Nearly half

are between the ages of 25 and 35 and count a maximum of four years of service with their employers.

- PPRs are skilled knowledge workers: virtually all have an undergraduate degree, 80% have a graduate degree and 25% have a postgraduate degree (doctorate).

| Diplomas   | %          |
|------------|------------|
| Bachelor's | Nearly all |
| Master's   | 80%        |
| Doctorate  | 25%        |

- PPRs play an essential and significant role in helping Québec universities fulfill their missions. They are very much involved in all steps related to the production and dissemination of scientific knowledge:
  - Over 50% of PPRs take part in the writing of scientific papers;
  - 40% participate in the writing of both research reports and scientific papers;
  - They coordinate activities and research projects, and supervise the training of students.
- In spite of the essential role they play in research work, PPRs are disadvantaged knowledge workers.
- They have little possibility of job security and few opportunities for promotion.

## Highlights

PPR

**A TRANSIENT WORKFORCE PPRs**  
*consist of a young population in terms of both their ages and years of service. Nearly 50% are between the ages of 25 and 35 and count a maximum of four years of service with their employers.*

### **Part-time employment and short-term contracts**

- One quarter of PPRs occupy a part-time job. This proportion consists of 17% men and 31% women.
- Nearly three quarters of PPRs have fixed-term contracts and 85% of these are one year or less.
- 80% of PPRs experience an atypical employment situation.

### **Maternity leave: not always easy**

Research professionals told us they are victims of discrimination when it comes to maternity leave. Eight percent (8%) affirm they were questioned about their maternity plans during hiring interviews.

### **Comparisons with a recognized model**

- According to a conceptual framework developed by EQCOTESST, 40% of PPRs fall into the category of working conditions that are qualified as “tense” and “active”, that is, they take on a bigger workload and have little

decision-making authority or control. PPRs contribute significantly to the research by performing more complex and value-added activities, while demonstrating great flexibility. They devote themselves passionately to their work, never hesitating to work extra hours. However, paradoxically, they get the least recognition on all fronts, i.e. little job security, few opportunities for promotion, unrecognized intellectual property, no advantage in terms of salary, as well as lower self-esteem. PPRs benefit from less social support on the part of both their superiors and their colleagues.

- In these “tense” and “active” models of work, there is a significant disparity between contributions and compensation. According to the scientific literature, this type of imbalance is likely to affect one’s mental health, leading to situations of psychological distress and burn out. This also translates into an increased desire to leave one’s job.
- As for tensions associated to work-life balance, these tend to be low due to the nature of the work, making it possible to work from home and benefit from a more flexible work schedule.
- Factors affecting quality of employment and quality of work are not quite the same.

## Highlights

### *Factors affecting quality of employment and quality of work are not quite the same.*

- The quality of employment is mainly associated with the duration of funding and the nature of resources available within the research organization. The longer the funding and the more research resources are available, the better is the quality of employment, notably in terms of job security and opportunities for promotion.

In terms of quality of work, it is mainly affected by the nature and demands of the work. The intensity and complexity of the work do not correspond with the quality and autonomy of the job. A coherent arrangement between these two sets of factors would require the development and implementation of appropriate organizational practices.

- The existence of an imbalance between contribution and compensation indicates the absence of adapted human resources management (HRM) practices. Consequently, external constraints, such as fluctuations in research funding on the one hand, and the nature and requirements of the job on the other hand, directly impact the quality of employment and the quality of work.

### *The challenge*

The challenge facing PPRs and research development in Québec is great. It consists in focusing on improving the quality of employment and the quality of work in order to improve research performance in Québec, as well as revising HRM practices in universities and affiliated centres to improve job security. It also requires stabilizing research funding by extending its duration and increasing the development of collective resources.

### *Recommendations*

Following this study, we have made many observations and prepared several recommendations. These centre around three main principles.

In the new National research and innovation policy, the Québec government must:

- recognize the essential contribution research professionals make to research in Québec universities;
- value the commitment and contribution made by research professionals towards grant applications;
- promote stability of research professionals in universities and affiliated centres in Québec.



## Highlights

Consistent with these main principles and in the spirit of the previous recommendations, we, the partners in this study, propose the following courses of action:

- that grants given to the three research funds of the Fonds de recherche du Québec be substantially increased to support the human capital for research in universities and affiliated centres in Québec;
  - that the Québec government's funding agencies consider the salary scales in the collective agreements of research professionals;
  - that the Québec government's funding agencies make sure that amounts budgeted are properly allocated for salaries of research professionals;
  - that research grants be for a minimum of five years;
  - that research professionals be included in the various advisory committees of the Fonds de recherche du Québec.
- We recommend the following to the minister of Enseignement supérieur, de la Recherche, de la Science et de la Technologie, as well as to universities and affiliated centres in Québec:
- that universities and affiliated centres be active in supporting the careers of research professionals by ensuring a minimum number of permanent research professionals within teams of researchers;
  - that universities and affiliated centres contribute (from their own operating funds) to the benefits package of research professionals, including the RREGOP or other retirement plans available in universities;
  - that universities and affiliated centres set up (from their own operating funds) an emergency fund to offer temporary support to research units where jobs of research professionals are directly threatened by a lack of funds;
  - that universities and affiliated centres respect the Act Respecting Labour Standards, ensuring that at the end of a maternity leave, research professionals are reinstated in their positions and benefit from the benefits package they would have if they had remained at work;
  - that universities and affiliated centres provide better human resources management to ensure stability of employment for research professionals.

The complete study is available at:

<http://goo.gl/aTW50K>

