Bill 21 (an « Act respecting the laicity of the State ») has produced negative or discriminatory effects on students and staff in faculties and departments of education in Quebec universities, a new survey finds.

The survey, conducted by an inter-university working group within the Observatoire sur la formation à la diversité et l’équité (OFDE), exposes problems resulting from Bill 21: (i) negative or discriminatory treatment experienced by student teachers in initial teacher education, which are said to be more frequent, normalized, overt, and even legitimized (although Bill 21 does not apply to student teachers); (ii) polarization and more clashes in the classroom, or hurtful comments related to Bill 21, generating open conflicts in some cases; (iii) negative effects (psychological effects, effects on academic achievement and professional induction) associated with Bill 21, affecting the relationship between personnel from the university and schools. The negative impacts observed since Bill 21 has come into effect shape relationships between peers, as well as university and partner schools’ staff.

The survey’s findings show that some respondents are at greater risk of being victims of or witnesses to such problematic or discriminatory situations or effects. Vulnerability factors include being an undergraduate student, identifying as female, being of immigrant background, having a first language other than French, and belonging to a visible or religious minority.

In addition to the problematic repercussions presented above, survey findings also indicate that universities have adopted specific measures in response to Bill 21. According to survey respondents, these are: institutional procedures aimed at preventing or avoiding discriminatory experiences for student teachers, statements of institutional position in regards to Bill 21, the transmission of information to those involved in teacher education and training (including in partner schools), and modifications to course content related to secularism, reasonable accommodation, human rights and freedoms, inclusion, and diversity.

For further information, see the Executive Summary attached. Also available for contact are the following members of OFDE’s working group:

Maryse Potvin, Professor, Université du Québec à Montréal : 514-519-8000, potvin.maryse@uqam.ca
Stéphanie Tremblay, Professor, Université du Québec à Montréal : tremblay.stephanie2@uqam.ca
Emmanuelle Doré, Professor, Université du Sherbrooke : emmanuelle.dore@usherbrooke.ca
Stéphanie Demers, Professor, Université du Québec en Outaouais : stephanie.dermers@uqo.ca
David Lefrançois, Professor, Université du Québec en Outaouais : 514-795-1414, david.lefrancois@uqo.ca
Bronwen Low, Professor, McGill University : bronwen.low@mcgill.ca

The complete report Survey on the effects of Bill 21 on Faculties and Departments of Education in Quebec universities, their students and staff will be available on the Observatoire sur la formation à la diversité et l’équité (ofde.ca) website in January 2021.