



UNION ÉTUDIANTE
DU QUÉBEC

BRIEF SUBMITTED TO THE STANDING COMMITTEE ON SCIENCE AND RESEARCH

Top talent, research and innovation

May 2022



Union Étudiante du Québec
6217 rue St-André
1-877-213-3551
unionetudiante.ca
info@unionetudiante.ca

©unionetudianteduquébec

The Quebec Student Union's (QSU) mission is to defend the rights and interests of the student community, of its member associations, and of their members by promoting, protecting, and ameliorating the conditions of students and those of local and international communities.

The QSU represents more than 91,000 university students from across Quebec. Its intention is to act as the primary interlocutor for all relevant actors at the different levels of government and within civil society organizations on matters relating to the accessibility of higher education and the living conditions of students.

SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendation 1

That the Government of Canada commit to increasing funding for student research grants in order to make up for the funding gap created by cuts between 2011 and 2015.

Recommendation 2

That the Government of Canada commit to extending the duration of funding provided through student research grant programs to reflect the real duration of academic programs, without reducing the annual amount for those grants.

Recommendation 3

That the three federal granting agencies reserve at least one seat on each of their respective boards of directors for a graduate student representative selected on the recommendation of his or her peers.

1. FEDERAL GRANTING AGENCIES

Federal granting agencies (FGAs) fund a significant portion of the research conducted in Canada. Through a number of granting programs operated by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC), the Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council (NSERC), and the Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR), the government funds a large number of student researchers. Unfortunately, funding for the FGAs has suffered in past years, particularly as regards funding for student grants. Research will have to be a core component in Canada's economic recovery. For that to be the case, it will need the right tools and adequate funding through the FGAs. The following recommendations offer solutions to meet those goals.

1.1 ACCESSIBILITY OF STUDENT GRANTS

Between 2011 and 2015, the Government of Canada made significant cuts to the federal granting agencies' budgets. In turn, this resulted in cuts to the funding for student grant programs and a reduction in the number of grants available.¹ Since 2015, the government has made significant reinvestments in FGA budgets, allowing their overall funding to catch up, and even exceed, inflation since 2010.² However, student grant programs didn't benefit from those reinvestments, even after suffering the effects of earlier cuts.³ The Government of Canada began addressing this situation with its 2019-2020 budget, which included a gradual reinvestment in FGAs for grants at the master's and doctoral level.⁴ The new funding will increase each year, over three years, to reach a recurring annual investment of \$26.5 million.⁵ Even though the new funds announced in 2019 are welcome, they aren't sufficient to make up for the effects of cuts from 2011 to 2015. Indeed, prior to the cuts, during the 2011-2012 award year, the percentage of FGA budgets allocated to grant programs was 16.9% at SSHRC, 6.3% at CIHR and 13.3% at NSERC. For the 2019-2020 award year, student funding had fallen to 13.0% of the SSHRC budget, 5.5% of the

¹ Quebec Student Union, "A Fair Share for Student Research," n.d., consulted on 2020-10-09, <https://unionetudiante.ca/fair-share-2/>

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Government of Canada. Budget 2019 – Investing in the middle class (Ottawa, Department of Finance Canada).

CIHR budget and 8.3% of the NSERC budget. The QSU has estimated that the accumulated gap in funding for student grants since 2011 is \$120 million.

Recommendation 1

That the Government of Canada commit to increasing funding for student research grants in order to make up for the funding gap created by cuts between 2011 and 2015.

1.2 DURATION OF STUDENT FUNDING⁶

Published in 2017, the Naylor Report⁷ provided a comprehensive overview of how science is financed in Canada. In its discussion of student funding, the document decried how research grants from the federal government, provided through the FGAs, have a shorter duration than the actual length of students' programs. Indeed, master's scholarships are valid for only one year, while most research master's programs take at least two years. The Naylor Report estimated that adding an additional year of funding to the master's program would cost approximately \$44 million. For their part, doctoral scholarships fund students for three years, even though the normal length of a PhD is longer than three years in virtually every academic discipline. Indeed, studies have found the average length of a PhD program to be five years.⁸ The exact cost of increasing the duration of doctoral funding wasn't determined in the Naylor Report, although it still explores the idea of increasing it from three years to four. In order to increase graduation rates, we must ensure that students don't lose their financial support mere months before completing their programs.

Recommendation 2

That the Government of Canada commit to extending the duration of funding provided through student research grant programs to reflect the real duration of academic programs, without reducing the annual amount for those grants.

⁶ Section taken from: Fédération des associations étudiantes du campus de l'Université de Montréal, 2021. Platform of Demands, 2021 Federal Elections, p. 9.

⁷ David Naylor, "Investing in Canada's Future: Strengthening the Foundations of Canadian Research, Canada's Fundamental Science Review," 2017, [http://www.sciencereview.ca/eic/site/059.nsf/vwapj/ScienceReview_April2017-rv.pdf/\\$file/ScienceReview_April2017-rv.pdf](http://www.sciencereview.ca/eic/site/059.nsf/vwapj/ScienceReview_April2017-rv.pdf/$file/ScienceReview_April2017-rv.pdf)

⁸ Rosanna Tamburri. "The PhD is in need of revision," *University Affairs*, February 6, 2013. <https://www.universityaffairs.ca/features/feature-article/the-phd-is-in-need-of-revision/>

1.3 STUDENT REPRESENTATION ON BOARDS OF DIRECTORS

The SSHRC, NSERC and CIHR each have a board of directors composed, respectively, of 15, 18, and 19 members appointed by the Canadian government.⁹¹⁰¹¹ These appointments include members from the private sector and from different parts of the university community. Each board of directors is responsible for distributing the federal budget appropriations granted to the organization, including to student programs. It is critical that students secure representation on these important decision-making bodies to make sure they are receiving their fair share of federal research funding. The student movement has presented this recommendation to the government several times, including at the Canadian Alliance of Student Association's (CASA-ACAÉ) Advocacy Week in February 2020. Despite repeated efforts, this recommendation was never able to gain support from the Conservative government, nor from the Liberal government since its election in 2015. The QSU is asking that one seat be reserved for a student on the board of directors of each federal granting agency.

Recommendation 3

That the three federal granting agencies reserve at least one seat on each of their respective boards of directors for a graduate student representative selected on the recommendation of his or her peers.

⁹ Government of Canada. "Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council: Council," May 25, 2021. http://www.sshrc-crsh.gc.ca/about-au_sujet/governance-gouvernance/committees-comites/council-conseil-eng.aspx

¹⁰ Government of Canada. "Justice Laws Website: Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council Act," March 26, 2019. <https://laws.justice.gc.ca/eng/acts/n-21/page-1.html>

¹¹ Government of Canada. "Canadian Institutes of Health Research: Governing Council - Members ," February 5 , 2019. <http://www.cihr-irsc.gc.ca/e/6953.html>