

Ottawa, July 28, 2023

Re: Email of July 2, 2023: Brief submission – Graduate scholarship and post-doctoral fellowship – Comité SRSR Committee – Soumission de mémoire – Bourses d'études supérieures fédérales

Dear MP Blanchette-Joncas,

Dear members of the SRSR committee – Graduate scholarship and post-doctoral fellowship

Thank you for your email and the opportunity to provide feedback on this important topic. It is a topic of critical importance not only to our students and the research ecosystem at our institution, but also to Canada, in a much broader sense.

The Ontario Council on Graduate Studies (OCGS) responded to your call, and the University of Ottawa agrees with the OCGS recommendations. This group represents those in charge of graduate programs at each Ontario university. Our institution participated in writing the OCGS letter. The recommendations are as follows:

Recommendation 1: Increase funding for the core budgets of the Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council (NSERC), the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC), the Canadian Institutes for Health Research (CIHR), and the Canada Foundation for Innovation to improve Canada's research and development competitiveness;

Recommendation 2: Raise the total support (number and value) of the Canada Graduate Scholarships and adjust them for inflation on a regular basis; and

Recommendation 3: Increase the number of Canada Graduate Scholarships and Post-Doctoral Fellowship awards to develop the next generation of highly qualified research talent.

Perhaps what is less clear from the letter from OCGS is the urgency of the situation. This is what our institutional letter will focus on. We know from reviewing the public information on your committee's website that others will also have made this point. Yet with little or no indexation in a time of high inflation, the financial reality of our graduate students is severely impacted, in ways that were rare over a decade ago. Here are some examples.

Many university graduates aspire to becoming tomorrow's R&D leaders in either the private sector or in their pursuit of an academic career, but either have to work part-time in parallel to their "full-time" studies or rely on food banks. This level of precarity is not compatible with high quality training the next generation of leaders for the knowledge economy.

Students' financial anxiety has led to strikes in many universities, for example for part-time work that master and PhD students do as teaching assistants. Carleton, Dalhousie and McMaster are recent examples. Our

graduate student association, the GSAÉD, has also regularly expressed grave concerns about graduate students growing financial difficulties and advocated on behalf of their members both internally and externally.

Graduate scholarships have remained frozen since 2003. But since 2003, inflation has increased the cost of living by 50%. Two decades without increase in the value of tri-council scholarships means that currently some provincial scholarships are higher than tri-council scholarships (e.g., FRQNT, doctoral, now at \$25K/year rather than \$21K/year for PGS D scholarships). In our opinion it is essential that tri-council graduate scholarships be increased, as they have typically set the standard for both provincial graduate scholarships, and for stipends that graduate students receive from tri-council research grants. Stipends are essential for students to be 100% focused on their studies, learning, improving their skills and getting the best research results they can get.

Unlike the reduced financial support for graduate programs, higher salaries and a strong job market are attracting our students. Admissions are down, especially at the doctoral level. More than ever, governments need to think of graduate studies as being a paid apprenticeship so that researchers are available to Canadian employers in the future. Without financial support, Canada's future competitiveness is at risk.

Internationally, the discontent of Canadian students is being talked about in the top scientific and academic journals geared to higher education. (See for example <https://www.nature.com/articles/d41586-023-01453-8>.) This type of publicity hurts our ability to attract talent from abroad and encourages Canadian talent to leave.

We hope this submission will be useful to your important work, and we thank you for giving us the opportunity to participate. Please do not hesitate to contact us if needed; we are only a few minutes away, on the other side of the Canal.

Sincerely yours,

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