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The University of Guelph's Submission to the Standing Committee on Science and Research

Submitted by Ben Bradshaw
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**OFFICE of GRADUATE &
POSTDOCTORAL STUDIES**

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Standing Committee on Science and Research
Sixth Floor, 131 Queen Street
House of Commons
Ottawa, ON K1A 0A6
Email: SRSR@parl.gc.ca

RE: Canada's non-indexation of graduate scholarship and post-doctoral fellowship

Dear Members of the Standing Committee on Science and Research,

On behalf of the University of Guelph, I am pleased to respond to your invitation to submit a brief to the House of Commons Standing Committee on Science and Research (SRSR) on the topic of Canada's non-indexation of graduate scholarship and post-doctoral fellowships issued by the federal government.

The University of Guelph echoes the position of Universities Canada and the Ontario Council for Graduate Studies that the federal government: 1) increase funding for the core budgets of NSERC, SSHRC, CIHR, and the CFI to improve Canada's research competitiveness; 2) raise the value of the Canada Graduate Scholarships (and adjust them for inflation on a regular basis); and 3) increase the number of Canada Graduate Scholarships and Post-Doctoral Fellowship awards to develop the next generation of highly qualified research talent.

Knowing, however, that all three recommendations may be challenging to address and that embracing just recommendation #2 by cutting the total number of awards available across Canada would be counterproductive, indeed disastrous, for the University of Guelph and other Canadian Universities, I am keen to offer nuanced reflections on the significance of federal awards for our graduate students and outline an ideal scenario for improving opportunities for the training of graduate students - both those who secure federal awards and those who do not.

Federal awards from NSERC, SSHRC and CIHR secured directly by graduate students are vital for their training. That said, the proportion of graduate students at the University of Guelph who receive such awards is minimal - just over 5% at present. Given these small numbers, which manifest at all Canadian Universities, it is evident that the attention recently directed to Canada's non-indexation of graduate scholarships is a proxy for the larger challenge of training graduate students in Canada.

Graduate student funding packages are generated from a mix of sources, including faculty awards, grants and contracts, student awards, and University operating funds manifesting in both graduate research stipends and graduate teaching assistantships. This mix is vital. That is, we are dependent on faculty- and student-secured monies like federal graduate awards to establish adequate funding packages for graduate students given that University operating funds are insufficient. Indeed, the modest monies generated by thesis-based graduate students through tuition and provincial grants alone create a serious fiscal challenge for universities seeking to train thesis-based graduate students.

Notwithstanding this dynamic mix of sources, across the University, our funding packages for graduate students no longer mirror/cover the cost of living - most notably the cost of housing and food - and this is putting significant strain on graduate students who do not have the financial means to make up the difference.

Ironically, given your committee's focus, this strain is less likely for the small minority of students who have been successful in securing federal awards. As is common practice across Canadian Universities, at the University of Guelph, federal graduate scholarships are coupled with other financial supports such as top-up awards, graduate research stipends, and graduate teaching assistantships. This is less true for the very best federal awards such as the Vanier, but it is undoubtedly true for the CGS M and PGS D awards. In short, the federal government's non-indexation of graduate scholarships is not especially problematic for awardees; it is, however, increasingly problematic for the Universities that train these students and the remaining 95% of graduate students without external funding.

If we continue with the status quo, inadequate graduate student funding will become even more problematic not just for individuals but for the University sector as a whole: our applicant pool will inevitably become smaller, including from equity deserving groups; and Canada will not be viewed as a suitable place for graduate training. The long-term implications of lower quality and less graduate training for Canada would be devastating. As you will have heard from others, graduate students are the engine of universities' research activities. This is not hyperbole. When Universities train graduate students, we not only produce highly qualified personnel for a variety of academic and professional settings but generate the knowledge and innovations that drive societal and economic good.

In contrast, were federal graduate awards to increase in value and/or the number of awardees to increase, graduate student awardees would be better off materially and, most significantly, Universities like ours could direct more of their operational funds to those students without



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awards, thereby enabling graduate student funding packages across the University to better match the current cost of living. Undoubtedly, the best scenario would see a reasonable increase in the value of individual awards coupled with a more significant increase in the number of awardees. This would be truly impactful.

Many thanks for inviting this input. We wish the committee well with its work and, of course, remain open to further conversations on this topic if requested.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Ben Bradshaw".

Ben Bradshaw
Assistant Vice-President, Graduate Studies



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Overview of the University of Guelph:

The University of Guelph is a top comprehensive, research-intensive institution that was established in 1964 by the University of Guelph Act. The university has been at the forefront of academic excellence and innovation, offering a diverse range of programs and fostering a vibrant learning community. With 30,000 students and three unique campuses, the University of Guelph is focused on training future leaders while also improving life. Whether it's in the sciences, humanities, social sciences, business, or the arts, our programs are designed to equip students with the knowledge, skills, and critical thinking abilities necessary for success in today's rapidly evolving global landscape.

We take pride in our commitment to research and innovation, addressing the pressing challenges facing society and making meaningful contributions globally. Our collaborative research initiatives and partnerships with industry, government, and community organizations ensure that our work has a positive impact on the world around us.