

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

July 20, 2023

**Re: House of Commons Standing Committee on Science and Research:  
Government of Canada Graduate Scholarship and Post-Doctoral Fellowship  
Programs**

Dear Members of the Committee:

The Maple League of Universities (Acadia University, Bishop's University, Mount Allison University, and St. Francis Xavier University) is pleased to contribute a brief to the House of Commons Standing Committee on Science and Research, which is examining federal government support for **graduate scholarships and post-doctoral fellowships**.

We applaud the Standing Committee's timely effort to examine federal support for graduate scholarships and post-doctoral fellowships. Although our four institutions are primarily focused on undergraduate education, we each have research-based graduate programs at the masters level, as well as a small number of doctoral programs. Moreover, post-doctoral fellowships are an important mechanism for supporting research efforts at each of our institutions, providing diverse research leadership experiences for these highly trained individuals who also serve as mentors for undergraduate students. This enriches the immersive, relationship-driven research ecosystems that small universities provide.

Federal support for graduate scholarships and post-doctoral fellowships suffers from several deficiencies, most significantly the static level of funding that has significantly eroded the value of these awards over time. As highlighted in the recent *Report of the Advisory Panel on the Federal Research Support System*, support for Canada's next generation of researchers is woefully inadequate. In the past decade, the funding levels required to attract and financially support undergraduate and graduate student research trainees, as well as post-doctoral fellows has increased significantly. These increased costs have been borne by universities, research grants/contracts held by faculty researchers, and by students themselves. In cases where the increased costs of graduate student research cannot be met, financial means rather than student talent, curiosity, and potential decides who contributes to the research enterprise in Canada.

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Other deficiencies in Tri-Agency funding for graduate scholarship awards (particularly at the masters level) relate to the duration of these awards, and the way they reflect models of graduate studies and research that exist primarily at large universities. In your deliberations, we would encourage you to reflect on how the federal government, by virtue of its central role in our national research funding system, can better support research and training efforts that reflect and broadly engage the full diversity of our nation's educational institutions, as well as recognize opportunities for research excellence across that spectrum.

We recommend that the federal government undertake the following actions to increase support for **graduate scholarships and post-doctoral fellowships** and ensure that the opportunities for graduate level training and post-doctoral research continue to be made available in an equitable manner at all Canadian universities eligible to receive Tri-Agency funding:

**1. Increase graduate and post-doctoral fellowship support by raising the value of the Canada Graduate Scholarship awards and Post-doctoral Fellowship Awards by 50% and adjusting these awards for inflation on a regular basis.**

Additionally, the Maple League of Universities supports the recommendation of Universities Canada to double the number of Canada Graduate Scholarships and Postdoctoral Fellowship awards to ensure equitable opportunities for students and post-doctoral fellows to conduct their research training and the initial stages of their research careers at small, medium, and large universities across Canada.

**2. Increase support for trainees by increasing base budgets for the federal Tri-Agencies.** As highlighted in the Advisory Panel on the Federal Research Support System, a crucial aspect of trainee support in Canada is delivered via research grants. A significant portion of graduate students and postdoctoral fellows are paid through stipends or salaries out of federal grant funding awarded to professors as opposed to through scholarships. Focusing only on dedicated graduate student and postdoctoral fellowship awards only addresses one means of support for graduate students and postdoctoral fellows. To address this, the Maple League of Universities supports the recommendation of Universities Canada to increase funding for the core budgets for the National Sciences and Engineering Research Council, the Social Sciences and Humanities Research council, the Canadian Institutes for Health Research, and the Canada Foundation for Innovation by 10% per year over the next 5 years to address the need for increased student and post-doctoral trainee support and increased federal support for research overall.

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**3. Return the CGS-M award to two years of funding support.** Smaller universities, such as those comprising the Maple League of Universities, operate a number of

research-intensive two-year terminal masters degrees. These are popular programs for students who want to advance their research skills after completing an undergraduate degree. The current limit of the Canada Graduate Scholarship (CGS)-Masters level awards to only one year of funding is highly prejudicial towards these students and their supervisors. It requires the university, the supervisor, or the student to find other sources of funding to support a second year of Masters study. This funding limit causes some students to leave their program of study after receiving what should be a prestigious federal research scholarship and diminishes the impact of federally funded research programs.

- 4. Establish graduate scholarship and post-doctoral fellowship awards specifically for under-represented scholars.** Dedicated graduate scholarships and post-doctoral fellowships can play an important role in increasing diversity in the Canadian research landscape. The federal government has established undergraduate research awards specifically for Indigenous and Black students and should expand these efforts to CGS-M awards, doctoral scholarships, and post-doctoral fellowships.
- 5. Expand and diversify federal support for Postdoctoral Fellows to increase the number of awards that will be held at small universities.** Post-doctoral fellows should be able to benefit from more diverse employment opportunities at universities across Canada to contribute to broad innovation and societal outcomes. Increased awards will lead to more opportunities for post-doctoral fellows to hold their awards at smaller universities where there may not be other sources of post-doctoral funding readily available. This will help ensure that these highly trained individuals can choose from a greater number of employment opportunities to suit their career interests, remain in Canada, and contribute to the economic and social outcomes in diverse communities.

Canada has the potential to leverage its considerable intellectual talent and invest in future talent to lead critically important research in all its regions. The main goal must be to build a research ecosystem that is inclusive, innovative, and impactful. This can only be achieved through more strategic investment in early career researchers to provide access to training through graduate scholarships and postdoctoral awards in universities across Canada's regions.

The Maple League of Universities appreciates the opportunity to convey our collective perspectives to the Standing Committee on Science and Research on how Canada can enhance Graduate Scholarship and Postdoctoral Fellowship Programs and we welcome further consultation to create an ecosystem where our research talent can thrive.

Yours sincerely,

Jack Rice  
Executive Director, The Maple League of Universities  
<https://www.mapleleague.ca/>  
[jhrice@stfx.ca](mailto:jhrice@stfx.ca)

c.c. Mr. Ray Ivany, Interim President and Vice Chancellor, Acadia University  
c.c. Dr. Sébastien Lebel-Grenier, Principal & Vice-Chancellor, Bishop's University  
c.c. Dr. Jeffrey Hennessy, Interim President and Vice Chancellor, Mount Allison University  
c.c. Dr. Andrew Hakin, President and Vice Chancellor, St. Francis Xavier University