

July 21, 2023

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

Dear Members of the Committee,

The [Ontario Council on Graduate Studies](#) (OCGS) welcomes the opportunity to provide input to the Standing Committee on Science and Research study on Canada's graduate scholarships and postdoctoral fellowships. As an affiliate body of the Council of Ontario Universities (COU), OCGS and its publicly assisted member universities work to promote the importance of graduate education, develop and implement best practices in the delivery of graduate education, and advocate for continuous improvement in graduate education in Ontario.

Graduate students and postdoctoral scholars play an instrumental role in driving universities' research activities. Without our student-investigators, research at the university would be significantly restrained, and Canada's capacity to innovate would suffer greatly. Such innovation is necessary for our economy and society to grow and thrive.

Having completed their studies, graduate students and postdoctoral scholars continue to make important contributions to Canada's economy and society, in various roles. Some of our PhD graduates serve as the next generation of faculty at Canadian universities, who teach students and conduct leading-edge research to further drive Canada's growth and innovation. Others take faculty positions globally and, through these roles, direct their own students to Canada for graduate programs.

As a sector, we are cognizant of the diversifying roles that graduate students play, particularly the growth in contributions of our students outside of academia. Graduate students and postdoctoral scholars are increasingly bringing their high-demand skills to the labour force outside of the academy, to drive innovation and change in the private, public and non-profit sectors.

Despite these important contributions that graduate students and postdoctoral scholars are making, federal funding for them has been stagnant for almost 20 years. When one considers the costs of tuition, fees, and other living expenses, the declining value in real terms of graduate student funding has increased financial burdens on both Canadians and international students studying in Canada.

Universities can and ought to be a pathway for retaining top Canadian talent, and attracting global thinkers, entrepreneurs, and innovators to Canada. The two-decade trend of decreasing support for graduate students and postdoctoral scholars has created significant risks from a global

competitiveness perspective, not just for Canadian universities and their graduate programs, but for Canada's economy and society more generally.

In the United States, it is common for universities to waive tuition for excellent graduate students. The practice is even more prevalent among top institutions. In Europe, universities are extraordinarily well-supported through public funds, which allow them to operate without tuition. Faced with these realities, excellent potential domestic and international candidates who may wish to study in Canada could be dissuaded and choose to pursue their graduate studies and research elsewhere.

As a sector, we also note the intersection of the Government of Canada's immigration and economic strategies that collectively rely heavily on new Canadians for continued demographic and economic growth. International graduate students are a key source of needed talent in fields for which substantive gaps exist in Canada, including engineering, computer sciences, and health. Competitive graduate scholarship funding would help our universities attract this top talent.

We encourage the government to explore more diverse options to achieve the goals of enhancing Canada's global competitiveness. We endorse the recommendations made to the Committee by the Canadian Association for Graduate Studies (CAGS) and Universities Canada that the Government:

**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.

Universities are key contributors to Canada's economic prosperity through their high-skill workforce training of both domestic and international students. While institutions continue to take action to provide supports for their students, it is imperative for the Government of Canada to provide adequate resources to future generations of graduate students and postdoctoral scholars to ensure a prosperous, fair, equitable and sustainable society for all Canadians.

Sincerely,

Jeffrey M. Casello, PhD



Chair, Ontario Council on Graduate Studies  
Associate Vice-President, Graduate Studies and Postdoctoral Affairs  
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