



Canadian Society for Brain, Behaviour and
Cognitive Science

Société Canadienne des Sciences du Cerveau,
du Comportement et de la Cognition

**WRITTEN SUBMISSION FOR THE
HOUSE OF COMMONS STANDING COMMITTEE ON FINANCE
PRE-BUDGET CONSULTATIONS IN ADVANCE OF THE 2021 BUDGET**

BY:

Canadian Society for Brain, Behaviour, and Cognitive Science

Dated: July 31st 2020

Recommendations

Recommendation 1: Invest in training of Canada's best and brightest young minds

- Increase investment in training up and coming scientists.
- Increase the number of recipients of postdoctoral funding.

Recommendation 2: Invest more money in a larger number of Canadian laboratories

- Invest more money in research in the field of psychological sciences and understanding of human behaviours
- Invest in a larger number of Canadian laboratories



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Dear Members of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Finance,

I am writing in my capacity as President of the Canadian Society for Brain, Behaviour, and Cognitive Science (CSBBCS). The CSBBCS represents hundreds of faculty and student scientists from across Canada who conduct basic and applied research on brain, behaviour, and cognition. Work conducted by our members includes brain mapping, delineating the scope and precision of human cognitive abilities, and developing cognitive technologies and machine learning algorithms. Members of the society are funded by the Tri-Council agencies. Therefore, our recommendations are focused on helping the committee understand the relationship between Tri-Council funding and Canada's scientific competitiveness on the international scene.

Understanding human behaviour, and creating models of mental health are more important than ever in these times of Covid19 restrictions. Whether it be in terms of understanding how to change behaviours (wearing masks) for the greater good, or in terms of proposing mechanisms by which mental health is negatively affected by isolation. **Basic research is of prime importance for Canada.** Until there is a safe and effective COVID-19 vaccine, our greatest defense is fostering cooperative and responsible behaviour to prevent the spread of the illness. Canadian researchers in the field of psychology are a precious resource, that we hope you will continue to nurture and support.

We want to express our sincere gratitude for the government's recent and positive commitment to Canadian science and its infusion of funds to Canadian laboratories. Those funds are crucial for Canadian laboratories to lead new initiatives. But of greatest importance is ensuring the pipeline of human talent. **We need your support for Canada's young scientists who will shape the country's scientific progress, and for laboratories creating the technological landscape for the years to come.** In keeping with our enthusiasm about the past year, we want to offer some advice and recommendations that will further enhance Canada's competitiveness in science and innovation.

Recommendation 1:

Invest in training of Canada's best and brightest young minds

We need to enhance domestic training opportunities for our best and brightest minds. We need to grow our own talent pool of graduate trainees, to maintain the stature of Canada as a world leader in understanding and creating models of human behaviour.

- **Item 1.** We urge you to correct the current limitations of the NSERC CGS-M scholarship program, by raising the CGS-M scholarship level from \$17,500/year for one year to \$22,000/year for two years.

Rationale: This suggestion is meant to align the term of the CGS-M scholarship program with the typical duration of Master's programs, and to correct for current costs of living. The CGS-M scholarships currently fund Master's students at a rate of \$17,500 for one year. This rate of funding has not changed for 15 years and, therefore, has not kept up with increases in the cost of living.

Secondly, CGS-M funding is granted for a duration of one year whereas the duration of a Master's degree in most Canadian Universities is two years. The consequence is that Canada's best Master's students, those who win Canada's most prestigious awards, are only funded for half of their degree and they are funded at the same rate they would have been 15 years ago.

- **Item 2.** We urge you to increase the value of NSERC Undergraduate Student Research Awards (USRA). In addition, we urge you to increase the number of awards, particularly in psychology, by one third as the need to understand human behaviour is more important now than ever before.

Rationale: The funding level for such awards hasn't increased in over 15 years (it is still only \$4500 for a 4-month work-term). Although faculty hiring such students offer financial supplements, the rate of pay for these prestigious awards is often less, or only a little more, than minimum wage. In order to retain our brightest minds, and foster the future of science in Canada, we recommend increasing the NSERC USRA award amount to \$6,000. Such a decision would have a direct impact on career development, and career choices, for young scholars.

- **Item 3.** We urge you to adjust the values of all doctoral scholarships (PGS-D/CGS-D) to \$35,000/year

Rationale: Doctoral scholarships are currently awarded at two rates: PGS-D awards provide \$21,000/year and CGS-D provide \$35,000/year. There are two problems with the current model. First, it sets up a caste system in a market where the value of a student's research is yet to be determined. Second, funding of \$21,000 was given 15 years ago and does not reflect increases changes in cost of living.

We recommend standardizing the value of all doctoral awards at \$35,000/year for all students. Doing so would reflect a realistic adjustment of award values in relation to inflation and address the inequities that the current system imposes on doctoral students in Canada.

- **Item 4.** We urge you to increase the number of post-doctoral fellowships by one third.

Rationale: We are concerned that we are losing our very best talent, at the pinnacle of their scientific training. The number of fellowships available to PhD graduates has not kept pace

with Canada's emergence on the world stage of psychological research. Our brightest doctoral students often leave Canada to pursue post-doctoral training elsewhere, due to a lack of funding opportunities here in Canada. This represents a massive loss of talent. The number of PDF fellowships needs to increase if Canada is to maintain its emerging status as a key player on the world stage of research. We do not want to lose the innovative minds that we have spent so much time training up to this point.

Recommendation 2:

Invest more money in a larger number of Canadian laboratories

Canadian psychological scientists are world-renowned in measuring all aspects of behaviours: Our scientists are having immediate impacts on society. For example, researchers are pinpointing the impacts of social isolation, and boredom, developing techniques to enhance memory - be it to alleviate deficits related to cognitive aging, or to improve retention in school-children and youths, and determining the brain basis of cognition as well as factors affecting its neural underpinnings.

- **Item 1.** We urge you to invest deeply into research to promote a greater diversity of investigation, and consequently innovation, from Canadian laboratories. As the world changes, so too must our science.

Rationale: We realize that there is a ceiling on investment, especially during these times of fiscal needs due to Covid-19. However, understanding human behaviour, and creating models of mental health, are important now more than ever.

We can use research to better understand what motivates behaviour, and to create models of learning and decision making across a variety of contexts. Psychological science forms the fundamental basis that will allow us to predict behaviours, and to understand factors that can bias and change viewpoints. Investing in researchers, across the country, will plant the necessary seeds to grow multiple ideas and models to adapt to today's changing world.

The CSBBCS extends its appreciation to the House of Commons Standing Committee on Finance for inviting input as part of the 2021 pre-budget consultation. Please do not hesitate to contact me if you would like any additional information.

Sincerely,


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