

# Written Submission for the Pre-Budget Consultations in Advance of the 2021 Federal Budget\*

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The Federation for the Humanities and Social Sciences

August 2020

\*This reflects our preliminary budget recommendations as of August 7, 2020. Our Board may revise these recommendations as the effects of COVID-19 continue to unfold, in which case we will provide Committee members with an updated version of this document.

## List of Recommendations

### **Recommendation 1: Invest in fundamental research and improve the balance of funding across disciplines**

Recently the Government of Canada has taken steps to improve our country's long-term competitiveness by reinvesting in our research system, including the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council. Budget 2021 must continue in this direction.

### **Recommendation 2: Protect institutions as they adapt to the ongoing challenges of COVID-19**

The federal government must work with post-secondary leaders to stabilize and sustain these essential institutions so they can continue their work on behalf of Canadians. In the wake of COVID-19, this should include a federal back-stop to offset revenue losses caused by a decline in international student enrollments.

### **Recommendation 3: Invest in digital infrastructure, online learning, and open science**

In addition to investing in digital infrastructure, the federal government should fund research and capacity building in education technology and online learning. It should also support and fund an open science strategy for federally funded research, as recommended by the Chief Science Officer and the February 2020 *Roadmap for Open Science*.

### **Recommendation 4: Support reconciliation and equity, diversity, and inclusion**

The federal government should increase investments in Indigenous education and support equity, diversity and inclusion in all aspects of Budget 2021. It should also fund new scholarships, bursaries, and research grants, and use these to create more opportunities for members of under-represented groups, including Black and Indigenous scholars and graduate students.

## Introduction

Our world is changing fast. From climate change to the rise of global populism and now pandemic recovery, huge global shifts require us all to have the right skills, knowledge and understanding to navigate an uncertain future.

Today's employers are looking for graduates with sophisticated communications skills; an ability to work with, understand and adapt to other people; and critical-thinking, analytical and problem-solving abilities. These skills help businesses grow and thrive. They're also the hallmarks of an education in the social sciences and humanities.

But the value of the social sciences and humanities goes well beyond jobs and the workforce. These disciplines discover, preserve and mobilize knowledge about Canada and Canadians – including our history, languages and cultural heritage. They strengthen our democracy. And they address big challenges, including reconciliation, climate change and yes, COVID-19.

In short, the social sciences and humanities are exactly what Canada and the world urgently need today and into the future.

Our disciplines make essential contributions to a prosperous, equitable and innovative society, including:

*Essential skill development:* About half of Canada's post-secondary students are enrolled in humanities and social sciences programs. These students go on to see high rates of employment and earnings. Canadian employers regularly emphasize their need for social and cognitive skills,<sup>1</sup> and as new technologies allow for more automation, the demand for these skills is only expected to grow.<sup>2</sup>

*Supporting a cohesive, democratic society:* One of Canada's greatest competitive advantages is its cohesive and democratic society, where people with different backgrounds and beliefs are able to collaborate effectively. In an era of rapid change, knowledge from the humanities and social sciences helps to maintain the systems that make our society work: trusted public institutions, effective public policies, healthy communities and strong cultural connections. Canada needs new thinking that reflects its unique bilingual, federal and multicultural context.

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<sup>1</sup> See, for instance, Business Council of Canada (2018), "Navigating change: 2018 Business Council Skills Survey."

<sup>2</sup> See, for instance, RBC (2018), "Humans Wanted: How Canadian youth can thrive in the age of disruption."

*Advancing equity and inclusion:* One of Canada’s most pressing challenges is ensuring that people from all backgrounds are able to prosper, thrive and contribute to society, free from discrimination. Knowledge from the humanities and social sciences is crucial in helping us understand the forces that contribute to inequality.

## Knowledge for a rapidly changing world

Almost overnight, COVID-19 made most of us more reliant than ever before on our modems and mobile devices. Our growing lists of virtual meetings and digital purchases are a reminder of the dramatic effects technology is having on companies, consumers, and entire industries.

While the pandemic may be accelerating changes in our economy, it didn’t create them. For years many experts have been predicting that automation driven by artificial intelligence will not only eliminate much of the repetitive physical work done by people, but also many routine cognitive tasks. What will remain—and likely grow in value—is what people do that cannot be reduced to an algorithm, including creativity, critical thinking, problem solving, leadership, empathy and other relational skills. These are central to the research of our scholars and integral to the education our students receive.

The same is true in the public sphere. Along with an explosion of social media, we have experienced a surge in “fake news,” fragmentation, and polarization. Not only do these trends pose a threat to our democracy, but, as we have seen recently, in the midst of a public health crisis they are a danger to peoples’ lives and well-being. Researchers investigating these trends can help us contain their risks, while they also help form the engaged, informed citizens we’ll need to resist the threats of the “post-truth” era.

And this is increasingly true of many of society’s most pressing issues: they are much more than technical challenges and resolving them will require much more than technical knowledge. COVID-19, for one, is being rigorously studied within the health sciences, but the quality of our pandemic response depends every bit as much on the contributions of sociologists, economists, political scientists, and historians, among others. The same is true of other major, public challenges: if it involves people, it involves the humanities and social sciences.

In Budget 2021 the federal government must take action to ensure that we have the knowledge and skills to address the complex challenges facing Canadians today. To that end, the Federation for the Humanities and Social Sciences makes the following recommendations.

### **Recommendation 1: Invest in fundamental research and improve the balance of funding across disciplines**

Recently the Government of Canada has taken steps to improve our country's long-term competitiveness by reinvesting in our research system, including the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council. Budget 2021 must continue in this direction.

In 2018 the federal government announced the largest multi-year investment in fundamental research in recent history, and modestly increased the share of overall research funding directed toward the humanities and social sciences. It was an important first step toward correcting the negative effects of many years of underinvestment.

Those years were especially hard on the humanities and social sciences, as governments all too often excluded these disciplines from new programs and funding opportunities. This is an error Canada cannot afford to repeat, considering the vital role of these disciplines in meeting the needs of an increasingly complex, knowledge-driven and service-oriented society.

### **Recommendation 2: Protect institutions as they adapt to the ongoing challenges of COVID-19**

While universities and colleges have reacted swiftly and effectively to the global pandemic, the job of sustainably adapting every campus in Canada to COVID-19 is a national challenge requiring a national response.

Canada's post secondary institutions can be engines of our COVID-recovery and create the knowledge and skills for a more equitable, sustainable, and prosperous future. To do so, however, will require the help of their partners in Ottawa. The federal government must work with post secondary leaders to stabilize and sustain these essential institutions so they can continue their work on behalf of Canadians. In the wake of COVID-19, this should include a federal back stop to offset revenue losses caused by a decline in international student enrollments.

### **Recommendation 3: Invest in digital infrastructure, online learning, and open science**

COVID-19 has forced institutions around the world to shift their activities online. As part of its recovery strategy, the federal government can help build the capacity of Canada's universities and colleges to provide all students with equitable access to online education and enable them to maintain and grow international and domestic student enrollments as online learning evolves. These investments can provide access to online courses for Indigenous students in community, and ensure that all students are able to attend regardless of disability, physical distancing, work or family requirements.

In addition to investing in digital infrastructure, the federal government should fund research and capacity building in education technology and online learning. It should also support and fund an Open Science strategy for federally funded research, as recommended by the Chief Science Officer and the February 2020 *Roadmap for Open Science*.

#### **Recommendation 4: Support reconciliation and equity, diversity, and inclusion**

In Canada and around the world, we are witnessing growing demands for action on issues of social and racial injustice. As the public conversations around these issues has grown, so has awareness of systemic discrimination, police violence and anti-Black racism, and the importance of working with First Nations, Inuit, and Métis peoples to support reconciliation and confront the affects of colonialism.

The need to address these issues is more urgent as a result of COVID-19, which is compounding many of our society's most serious inequities. This is a time for federal leadership. The federal government should increase investments in Indigenous education and support equity, diversity and inclusion in all aspects of Budget 2021. It should also fund new scholarships, bursaries, and research grants, and use these to create more opportunities for members of under-represented groups, including Black and Indigenous scholars and graduate students.

#### **Conclusion**

Scholars in the humanities and social sciences make vital contributions that support Canada's prosperity and competitiveness. Although the federal government has taken many worthwhile steps in recent years, it must take further action now to support Canada's COVID-recovery and build a more equitable, sustainable, and prosperous future.

The Federation for the Humanities and Social Sciences promotes research and teaching for the advancement of an inclusive, democratic and prosperous society. With a membership now comprising over 160 universities, colleges and scholarly associations, the Federation represents a diverse community of 91,000 researchers and graduate students across Canada.

The Federation:

- Organizes Canada's largest annual gathering of academic researchers, the Congress of the Humanities and Social Sciences
- Brings leading scholars to Parliament Hill to discuss public policy and public relevance in our *Big Thinking* lecture series
- Supports the publication and sharing of new ideas through our Awards to Scholarly Publications Program

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