

February 22, 2022

Dear Members of the Standing Committee on Science and Research,

Our names are Sivani Baskaran and Anh-Khoi Trinh, and we are part of the next generation of scientists. Sivani is a PhD candidate at the University of Toronto, and a co-founder and past President of the [Toronto Science Policy Network](#) (TSPN). Anh-Khoi is a PhD candidate at McGill University, and a Director and past President of the Montreal-based non-profit [Science & Policy Exchange](#) (SPE). Both SPE and TSPN are non-partisan science policy organizations led by research trainees (graduate students, and other next-generation researchers) and post-doctoral fellows, with the goal of providing a platform to amplify the voices of trainees who want to contribute to science policy in Canada.

We have been following the efforts of this Standing Committee with great interest. We, and other next-generation researchers, are encouraged by the enthusiasm and interest of the Committee during the ongoing study of the Successes, Challenges and Opportunities for Science in Canada. The recommendations from this critical study can strengthen the very foundations of our research ecosystem.

Although students and post-doctoral fellows have been mentioned repeatedly throughout the Committee's ongoing study, members of this next generation have yet to be called upon as a witness. Research trainees and post-doctoral fellows contribute enormous labour and intellectual insights to the Canadian enterprise, with the majority of scientific experiments, lab work and field work being done by research trainees. Because of this, **we believe that the experiences of research trainees deserve greater consideration, and that the inclusion of their perspectives would better inform the committee's actions.**

Despite being major contributors to Canadian research, research trainees and postdoctoral fellows grapple with student debt, increasing costs of living, and financial insecurity (e.g., student stipends have not even been adjusted for inflation for the [past 19 years](#)). Of the [63,000 graduate students in Canada \(2019\)](#), most are in their 20s and 30s, and some are parents, caregivers, and international students. Less than 33% of students receive direct funding from a Tri-Council graduate award. As a result, financial barriers can discourage people from pursuing graduate school in Canada, especially people belonging to lower income and marginalized communities. These financial barriers are exacerbated by an overwhelming research workload, compounded by teaching tasks and publishing pressures.

To date, the diversity and nuances of graduate student experiences has not been discussed by the Standing Committee. **Therefore, we are interested in sharing the experiences of research trainees in Canada with the Committee** – the successes and challenges we've faced, the opportunities we've had to carve out for ourselves, and our role in shaping Canada's future.

Over the past five years, SPE, TSPN, and several groups have documented the experiences of graduate students and postdoctoral fellows. [SPE](#) and [TSPN](#)'s studies identified key gaps in federal research funding support for graduate students, paving the way for many [policy recommendations](#) to better support future generations, including the need to:

1. **Increase and standardize the value of federal awards** to \$21,000 for master's awards, \$35,000 for doctoral awards, and \$50,000 for postdoctoral fellows, and ensure the value continues to increase annually to match inflation and the rising cost of living.
2. **Modify the eligibility criteria for awards** to increase accessibility and ensure equity for all graduate students.
3. **Abolish the Vanier and Banting Awards, and redirect funds** towards increasing the number and value of Canada Graduate Scholarships Program and Postdoctoral Fellowships to support a greater number of students.

As research trainees who started their graduate studies inspired by the vision outlined in the Fundamental Science Review, we believe our knowledge of the science policy landscape, and our lived experiences as graduate students offers a unique perspective and allows us to provide policy options for this committee to consider. **We would be pleased to discuss the role of the next generation of researchers in Canada with members of the Standing Committee, and how we can better support research and innovation in Canada.**

We look forward to discussing what the Standing Committee can do to support the next, and future generations of scientists and leaders. Thank you for your work in supporting science and evidence in our democracy.

Yours sincerely,



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