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• (1105)

[English]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Corey Tochor (Saskatoon—University, CPC)): Welcome to meeting number 42 of the Standing Committee on Science and Research.

Today's meeting is taking place in a hybrid format pursuant to the House order of June 23, 2022. Members are attending in person in the room and remotely using the Zoom application.

Before we get going, I would like to make a few comments for the benefit of our witnesses and members.

For interpretation for those on Zoom, you have the choice at the bottom of your screen of either floor, English or French audio. For those in the room, you can use the earpiece and select the desired channel.

I will remind you that all comments should be addressed through the chair.

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(3)(i) and the motion adopted by the committee on Tuesday, February 14, 2023, the committee is commencing its study of the Government of Canada's graduate scholarship and post-doctoral fellowship programs.

We have three witnesses on the first panel. Each will have a five-minute opening statement, and then there will be rounds of questions from the different respective parties here in the room.

To start off our first five minutes, we will have, from the Canadian Alliance of Student Associations—

I recognize Ben Lobb.

Mr. Ben Lobb (Huron—Bruce, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'll keep this brief.

It's just a comment for the committee. It comes out of the occurrences of the last meeting and the subcommittee meeting. I'm putting this on the record. I don't know what my colleagues think. They don't have to say anything about it now anyways if they don't want to. I just want it on the record.

My preference would be to not have subcommittee meetings to discuss the future business of the committee. Maybe for scheduling, perhaps, for calendar-type things, but for the details of what will be studied and when, I think all members of the committee should be allowed to be part of the discussion. Through past meetings that we've had, it has worked out well.

I notice that today there are a few members from our regular committee who are not here, so we can have a discussion on this later. I wanted to put that on the record. I always like to hear everybody else's comments about what they're thinking, rather than being told what occurred and how we're going to do it.

That's all.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Corey Tochor): Thank you, Mr. Lobb.

Mr. Lauzon, I'll let you have the floor quickly, and then we'll get into the witnesses.

[Translation]

Mr. Stéphane Lauzon (Argenteuil—La Petite-Nation, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

We did hear my colleague's recommendation. Since several members of the committee, including the chair, are absent today, I think we agree with Mr. Lobb that we should postpone this discussion to a future meeting.

• (1110)

[English]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Corey Tochor): As the vice-chair and temporarily in this role, I'll say that we'll keep those comments on the record and I appreciate the different takes on how we should be running this committee and how we can best serve the constituents and the House of Commons through the important work we do in this committee.

I'll go back to the witnesses. I will give each witness five minutes to make an opening statement, and then we'll have some rounds of questioning.

First up, from the Canadian Alliance of Student Associations, we have Mackenzy Metcalfe.

You have five minutes.

Ms. Mackenzy Metcalfe (Executive Director, Canadian Alliance of Student Associations): Thank you.

Good morning, honourable chair, esteemed committee members and fellow witnesses.

I would like to begin my statement by acknowledging that we are meeting today on the territory of the Anishinabe Algonquin nation.

My name is Mackenzy Metcalfe. I'm the executive director of the Canadian Alliance of Student Associations, or CASA. We are a non-partisan, not-for-profit organization that represents college, polytechnic and university students from coast to coast to coast. Through our formal partnership with the Union étudiante du Québec, we are a trusted national student voice, together representing 365,000 students across the country.

First, I'd like to thank the committee for recognizing the importance of students through the study of the Government of Canada's graduate scholarship and post-doctoral fellowship programs.

On Monday, May 1, thousands of graduate students walked off their university campuses across 45 schools in support of increased funding for tri-agency grants for graduate and post-doctoral researchers. Students want to study in Canada. They want to stay in Canada and build their careers here. Students want to contribute to Canada's research ecosystem. Canadian students use tri-agency awards as a point of entry into this research. However, without increased investments in these awards, many students simply cannot afford to.

Today, CASA is calling on the government to support Canadian research by increasing the award values and the number of awards available, and by legislating specific student seats on each of these governing councils.

The Government of Canada's graduate scholarship and post-doctoral fellowship programs drive the science and innovation that keep Canada globally competitive. Without graduate student work, Canadian research and development would grind to a halt. Specifically, these programs in question today, provided through the tri-agencies, provide government-funded research grants to grad students who help keep Canada at the forefront of industry. Though I myself am not a graduate student, I've heard from graduate students how important this funding is, as it often sets the precedent for Canada's top graduate researchers and what others in the field are paid for their work.

These students engage in full-time work as researchers and their scholarships act as their primary source of income to pay their rent, child care costs, groceries and other expenses. Often, these students are restricted from having other jobs, as their attention is and should be completely focused on their research. However, even with the tremendous value these scholars bring to Canada, the government funding provided for the most prestigious graduate awards amounts to less than minimum wage in many parts of the country. Graduate award values for Canada's tri-agencies have not changed since 2003, despite inflation rising 48% during this time. With the current value of these awards, we have researchers aspiring to study beyond Canada's border—not because they want to, but because they have no other choice.

Other countries are taking action to equip their scientists with the funds for cutting-edge research. The U.S.A.'s CHIPS Act more than doubled their national science fund commitment over a period of five years and increased their graduate research fellowships by 50%.

Every student researcher who chooses to study abroad to pursue better research funding in the United States, Europe or elsewhere is a lost future innovator, entrepreneur or Canada research chair.

Let me be clear. This is a government that has made many investments in students: removing the interest on Canada's student loans, increasing grants through Canada student grants, and making project-specific investments in the sciences and tri-councils in previous budgets. However, even the previous investments in Canadian research have not trickled down to the pockets of graduate researchers, who have been making the same wage since 2003. Good science requires the best scientists, and the best scientists deserve to be paid an equitable living wage for their cutting-edge research.

This brings me to the end of my remarks, but I wish to briefly reiterate our recommendations.

First, increase the amount of funding for the Government of Canada's graduate scholarship and post-doctoral fellowship programs to compensate students for their work.

Second, simultaneously double the number of awards given out through these programs.

Third, legislate a reserved student seat on each of the governing councils to ensure student perspectives are always taken into account in future tri-agency decisions.

On behalf of our member at CASA, I thank you for the opportunity to speak today and look forward to answering your questions.

• (1115)

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Corey Tochor): Thank you so much for that testimony.

We're now going to move online to the Canadian Federation of Students. We have Hilary Hennessey.

The floor is yours, Hilary, for five minutes.

Ms. Hilary Hennessey (Campaign Coordinator, Canadian Federation of Students): Hello, everyone. Thank you so much for this opportunity.

I come to you from Newfoundland and Labrador. The island of Newfoundland is the unceded traditional territory of the Beothuk and the Mi'kmaq, and we acknowledge Labrador as the traditional and ancestral homelands of the Innu of Nitassinan, the Inuit of Nunatsiavut and the Inuit of NunatuKavut.

Thank you for allowing me to speak today. I'm very new to this role, but I am the campaign commissioner for the national graduate caucus, representing all graduate students across Canada.

I have a few things I would like to raise today, such as the poverty that students are facing: 71% of graduate students live below the poverty line, and one in three graduate students lives on less than \$1,250 a month. This is incredibly low, and is creating lots of struggles and barriers for students in completing their research and also creating a life for themselves.

On May 1, as Mackenzy said, thousands of graduate students, post-doctoral fellows, faculty, staff and community supporters across Canada walked out of their academic institutions to demand increased federal investments in scholarships, fellowships and grants to support increased pay for graduate students and post-doctoral fellowships. Although I am not an international student, I want to recommend that it is incredibly important that we create substantial funding to allow graduate students to pursue their studies without the stress of being able to afford their daily life. Lots of students do not have access to federal and provincial funding, and we would like to see them have access to this.

Our recommendations are set forth in section 4 of our pre-budget submission. We want to extend eligibility for Canada student grants to graduate students, estimated at \$25 million per year.

We recommend exploring the creation of dedicated research fellowships for indigenous and international students. As I said, they are not adequate, so we would like to see approximately \$30 million per year associated to this.

We would like to increase the value of graduate scholarships and post-doctoral fellowships awarded by the tri-council agencies by 48%, to match inflation since 2003—especially the post-graduate scholarships.

We would like to see all award values indexed to the consumer price index, which will ensure that awards are internationally competitive and increase with the cost of living.

We recommend doubling the number of post-doctoral fellowships awarded by tri-council agencies. The cost is \$51 million in 2023, and we would like to see that doubled.

We would like to see a 50% increase in the number of graduate scholarships awarded by the tri-council agencies. We would like to see that increase as well.

It has been communicated to me that there is no mention of graduate students in the last budget, specifically in research or science. As government has been vocally supportive of this research, and of research in general, we are looking for the government to action ways that we can increase research in Canada and create a better experience for students.

Thank you so much for this opportunity. I look forward to answering your questions as well.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Corey Tochor): Thank you as well for your testimony.

We are now moving on to the final witness for this panel. We have Samy-Jane Tremblay, president of the Quebec Student Union.

You have the floor for five minutes.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Samy-Jane Tremblay (President, Quebec Student Union): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I would also like to thank the committee for its invitation.

My name is Samy-Jane Tremblay, and I'm the president of the Union étudiante du Québec. The UEQ represents more than 91,000 university students throughout Quebec, including more than 25,000 graduate students. The UEQ has a partnership with the Canadian Alliance of Student Associations. Together, they represent over 365,000 students across Canada. The UEQ and the alliance support the Support Our Science organization, which aims to promote greater funding for graduate students. On May 1, we participated in a march with underfunded students to support this cause.

As you know, there has been no investment in increased funding since 2003. However, research without students is simply impossible.

We are currently in a critical situation. Canada is the only G7 country to have reduced its investment in research and development over the past 20 years. However, other countries have recognized that this is a priority and have set ambitious research targets.

The Advisory Panel on the Federal Research Support System recently tabled a report—the Bouchard report—that stated that Germany plans to increase its research investment to 3.5% of GDP by 2025 and Finland, to 4% of GDP by 2030. Canada, on the other hand, is at 1.6% of its GDP. This is clearly insufficient to compete internationally. The Bouchard report clearly explains that research funding has not kept pace with the pressures of the last 20 years.

In addition to international competition, there is growth in the size and activity of the research system. According to the Bank of Canada, inflation has increased by 50.63% between 2003 and 2023, yet, the amount of scholarships hasn't increased since 2003, even though they should be indexed to the cost of living, as is the case in Australia. The number of scholarships should also be increased in order to better support the pool of young scientists that is indeed present throughout the country.

This is a serious matter. Canada is falling behind in research, science and innovation. It isn't a priority, and it should be. We're talking about the future of our country and the work that needs to be done to solve major societal challenges. By not investing in the next generation of scientists, Canada is encouraging a brain drain and losing great talent, and this, it must be remembered, in a context of a shortage of skilled labour.

To remedy the situation and to deal with the constant pressures we are currently experiencing, the solution is simple. The Bouchard report should be put into practice and massive investments should be made in research and development. To do this, we must not only increase the amount and number of scholarships for students, but also increase the grants that support a majority of graduate students.

Another issue that was exposed, this time by the 2017 Naylor Report, is that the length of current funding does not match the actual length of study. To give you an idea, federal granting agencies award one-year master's scholarships, while a master's degree takes at least two years to complete. At the doctoral level, students receive a three-year award, while a doctorate takes at least four years to complete. This is a problematic situation, because students are not funded at the end of the course, and they need it. At that point, students are going to have to find alternative sources of funding or delay graduation or even abandon their study and research project. By way of comparison, the Quebec granting agencies of the Fonds de recherche du Québec fund master's degrees for two years and PhDs for four years. We invite Canada to apply the same measure, which is much more realistic.

If we are talking about challenges that concern the student population, it's important that they be able to express their views on the decisions that are made. Currently, the three federal granting councils do not reserve any of their board seats for students, unlike in Quebec. Indeed, the boards of the Fonds de recherche du Québec and the student intersectoral committee of Rémi Quirion, Quebec's chief scientist, reserve seats for the student population to express their views. We therefore call on Canada to amend the legislation governing the three federal granting agencies to ensure that seats are allocated and reserved for the student population, thus allowing them to voice their concerns and express their views.

In closing, I want to remind you that the contributions of graduate students and post-doctoral fellows are significant. The future of our country will depend on investments in research and development. To attract and retain the best talent, Canada must make this a priority, as other countries are doing.

Thank you. I am now ready for your questions and discussion.

• (1120)

[English]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Corey Tochor): Thank you so much for that testimony.

Now we'll open up the rounds of questioning. This will be the six-minute round, starting off with the Conservatives and Mr. Mazier.

Mr. Dan Mazier (Dauphin—Swan River—Neepawa, CPC): Thank you, Chair, and thank you to the witnesses for coming out here today.

We have some out-of-control inflationary spending and out-of-control spending as well, and it's causing inflation, I guess. Those on fixed and lower incomes are being particularly hit, especially students, and they are finding it difficult to live.

After eight years of this government, there are some startling statistics that I want to share with you. Rent has doubled. Students

are now paying 25% more for housing than the average Canadian renter is. We've heard stories of students living in homeless shelters. Inflation reached a 40-year high last year. Interest costs have increased to a 15-year high. Forty per cent of undergraduate students and 50% of graduate students say they are worried about running out of food. Food bank use on campus is reaching new highs. Food is becoming unaffordable, and we continue to see more Canadians skipping meals.

This is for all three of you, and you'll be able to elaborate here. Not only has this government not increased scholarships and fellowship programs, but the cost of living is also out of control. Can you describe how this funding freeze and the increase in the cost of living have impacted the students you represent?

Ms. Tremblay, we can start with you.

• (1125)

[Translation]

Ms. Samy-Jane Tremblay: Yes, the freeze on the amount of grants has had a significant impact on students. To give you an idea, at present, the amount of the grants isn't harmonized between the three federal granting agencies, nor is the duration of the funding. As a result, there are disparities in award amounts, which can range from as low as \$17,500 to as high as \$35,000 and even \$50,000 for prestigious awards such as the Vanier scholarship.

In fact, we recommend lowering the amount of these prestigious awards to fund more students. These prestigious scholarships are worth \$50,000 per year for three years, so we suggest reducing them to the level of the Canada graduate scholarships, which is \$35,000. This would allow for more students to be funded, with less of the impact you mentioned, and less financial insecurity.

[English]

Mr. Dan Mazier: Thank you.

Ms. Metcalfe, are you aware of the difference? We talked about the G7 compared to any other countries, and the difference between here and the U.S. in scholarships and what they're actually getting paid. We've been asking for an increase in funding, but what is the actual dollar amount we're talking about, the difference between taking your post-doc down in the States versus taking it here in Canada. What does that difference look like?

Ms. Mackenzy Metcalfe: With the recent investment they made in the United States with the CHIPS Act, their graduate fellows earn around \$50,000 a year Canadian compared to \$17,500 for the Canadian master's funding that is provided, as an equivalent.

To address your question from the beginning, I work with students every single day from coast to coast to coast, and for the past three years the number one thing I've been hearing from Vancouver Island all the way to the east coast is concern about affordability. We have also heard similar concerns about students accessing food banks at higher rates and really being concerned about being able to afford to get an education. There have been investments in the sciences, specifically in the 2018 budget, but unfortunately that money hasn't trickled down to the amounts for graduate students, who are still living off the same amounts that they were in 2003.

Mr. Dan Mazier: That's the fundamental problem. Instead of focusing on the students, the funding does not allow for, "Here's what we have to pay," like a living wage almost, to make sure that the students are looked after, because they are going to actually do the work.

Ms. Hennessey, do you have anything to add?

Ms. Hilary Hennessey: I definitely do. You raised some great points that need to be addressed, in my opinion. Students are working a lot of hours to try to make a living for themselves and to afford the cost of living, because inflation has made the cost of everything so high. These low wages that we're seeing in scholarships and grants are keeping these individuals in precarious financial positions that are preventing students from really dedicating their time and effort to their studies.

As the other panellists here today have mentioned, we're seeing students reach out to external resources to try to get support, which usually ends up not being successful for them. There are inadequate social supports for students, so we're leaving them in very hard positions that are taking away from their research and from their experience as graduate students.

I believe it's important to say as well that 64% of students—and this data comes from our recent survey—say that the cost of tuition and student debt they are facing is negatively impacting their mental health. There's a lot of stress associated with being a graduate student, which means a lot of people are being excluded from pursuing graduate studies, and it is preventing them from contributing to research and contributing to our economy in this way.

That's all I have to say, but thank you for the opportunity.

• (1130)

Mr. Dan Mazier: Briefly, you mentioned the budget and how that was a budget ask on the pre-budget consultations. Are you aware that there was no mention of and no budget increase for graduates in this last budget?

Ms. Hilary Hennessey: Yes, I am aware that there was no increase.

Mr. Dan Mazier: Thank you.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Corey Tochor): All right. Moving on to the next round of questions, Mr. Lauzon, the floor is yours for six minutes.

[Translation]

Mr. Stéphane Lauzon: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

First of all, I would like to thank the three witnesses. We did hear some agreement in their speeches. They mentioned the need to in-

crease the budgets that have been frozen since 2003. They also talked a lot about the scholarship system.

Ms. Tremblay, you spoke mainly about the need to harmonize funding, which you consider important. You also suggested that the amount of the prestigious scholarships should be changed. Do you think that the committee needs to look at the distribution of the amounts as well as the funding? I'm not saying that one goes without the other, but should we be talking about both at the same time?

Ms. Samy-Jane Tremblay: I think we have to talk about both at the same time. When we talk about research funding, it's important to think about how the money is distributed by the three federal granting agencies. Right now, the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council, or SSHRC, awards four-year grants, which is a good thing. The other granting agencies, however, only award three-year grants. We also need to talk about the amounts of the awards. SSHRC is giving a \$20,000 grant, while the Canadian Institutes of Health Research is going to give a \$35,000 grant. So we need to harmonize these measures to ensure that students are funded at the same level.

Mr. Stéphane Lauzon: The witnesses also talked about the importance of having student representatives on the boards of these granting agencies in order to intervene in the distribution of scholarships. I'd like to hear more about that.

Ms. Metcalfe, I'd like to hear your comments on the importance of having your members on these boards to make the right decisions on the distribution of scholarship dollars

[English]

Ms. Mackenzy Metcalfe: I'm sorry. The translation is just catching up.

One of the recommendations that we are putting forward today is asking the government to legislate a student seat on these tri-councils. This is something that we think will be a bit of a proactive measure, so that students' concerns and experiences on the ground as researchers can be taken into account proactively as these tri-councils make decisions.

Obviously, the award amounts haven't been increased since 2003. We think having a student mandated at that table will help prevent challenges like this in the future. I'll note that these 19 seats for the councils are not always filled. We have spoken with different people in the appointments office about different processes, so we definitely think the government is hearing us on this, but we would like to see it in legislation so that problems like this don't arise again.

Mr. Stéphane Lauzon: I have one last question for Madame Hennessey.

[*Translation*]

You talked about the fact that some students don't have access to scholarships. You went a little further, I think, in saying that parity is an issue and that some of your international students have some difficulties because of a lack of flexibility.

Based on your experiences and the testimony of your members, how could the current scholarship programs be improved to provide more flexibility to meet the needs of today's students, compared to students two decades ago?

[*English*]

Ms. Hilary Hennessey: That's a great question. I'd be happy to elaborate.

I think that it's important. Again, I really want to acknowledge that I am not an international student, but I am voicing the concerns that I have heard from international graduate students.

I think they'd be able to increase the available grant and scholarship opportunities by making them available to all, not just to Canadian citizens or people who are permanent residents. This is creating a barrier for international students who are coming into our country to pursue studies and do not have this recognition of PR or citizenship.

Breaking down those structural barriers will create more access to funding and postgraduate studies.

• (1135)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Stéphane Lauzon: Thank you for also talking about mental health. It's something that's rarely talked about in the student community. Could you talk more about the concerns of your members and the resources they have right now to help them when they are in distress, often because of funding?

[*English*]

Ms. Hilary Hennessey: Yes, students are under stress because our social supports here in Canada are underfunded. Specifically in my province, they are very underfunded. I'm in Newfoundland and Labrador, as mentioned earlier. The wait-lists, as well, are so high for students to get counselling, so that creates barriers—that there are not enough counsellors.

The systems within each university are not effective. We're seeing people not able to really connect with their counsellors, especially people who are racialized or indigenous, because there is a lack of BIPOC counsellors available to students.

We're seeing a lot here. I think the main mental burden on students is the financial stress they are going through because they are unable to afford their education without working so hard. Being able to get this funding would be life-changing for them, from my perspective.

Mr. Stéphane Lauzon: Thank you.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Corey Tochor): Thank you very much for that.

Now we'll go on to the next member of Parliament.

We have, from the Bloc, Mr. Lemire.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Sébastien Lemire (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

First of all, I would like to acknowledge the leadership of my colleague Maxime Blanchette-Joncas, who raised this issue. This cannot be done without the support of the student associations.

As a former member of the student movement myself, I salute the commitment and the quality of the demands of our three witnesses. In all of this, and based on reports such as the Naylor report or, more recently, the Bouchard report, we see that underfunding is absolutely critical.

In my opinion, one recommendation encompasses all the other recommendations as they stand, and that's the issue of psychological health, which is a direct consequence of this problem. I'd like to hear from the witnesses on that.

Ms. Tremblay, I'll start with you. What's your connection between financial insecurity and mental health? There was talk of a new \$500 million fund over four years to hire mental health professionals. Is underfunding also a result of the impact on mental health?

Ms. Samy-Jane Tremblay: Thank you for the question.

In 2018, UEQ conducted a psychological health survey of over 23,000 students. This survey gave us alarming results. Indeed, 58% of the student population has a high level of psychological distress, compared to 20% of the Quebec population. We saw how financial insecurity had a major impact on the psychological distress and emotional exhaustion of students, as well as on depressive symptoms, particularly among graduate students.

So I think that increasing funding for graduate students reduces the risk of psychological distress and the mental burden on graduate students.

Mr. Sébastien Lemire: I take exception to the fact that a lot of people will say that students have an easy life and that they are weak in the context, and that the amounts they receive are enough. Some people say that they just have to go into debt anyway, because they'll have their whole lives to catch up. As you know, we hear these arguments, and they aren't new.

In the psychological health argument, you talked a lot about COVID-19. What about now that we're out of the pandemic? What are your impressions from the field? Is this issue still as important?

Ms. Samy-Jane Tremblay: Psychological health is still as important as ever and must be taken into account. We need to take action on psychological health. The study I was telling you about was done in 2018, so it was before the pandemic. We saw that the psychological health of students was greatly affected during the pandemic.

I'm going to pick up on one of the points you just made about students, that they can pay off their debt after they graduate. Be aware that graduate students should be seen more as workers. A person doing research is doing it full time. They work directly on the innovation of the country. They should be paid as other countries do.

Mr. Sébastien Lemire: Indeed, students are often considered to be cheap labour. The university system also focuses on that, that the work is done by students. Without going so far as to say that the professor will take all the credit, there is a lot of background work done by the students. Are these working conditions optimal? Are students who do research work sufficiently compensated?

• (1140)

Ms. Samy-Jane Tremblay: No. There are a lot of students who aren't funded. You probably already know that federal and provincial granting agencies don't provide funding to all students. Often it's the professors who have to pay the people who do research with them.

There is also a direct link between funding and graduation. The Canada Research Chair on the Transformations of Scholarly Communication at the University of Montreal told us that a student who receives funding is more likely to graduate than a student who doesn't.

Mr. Sébastien Lemire: I have a lot of questions about the distribution of scholarships, especially about the funding of basic science versus applied science. Obviously, I think that the whole field of the humanities and social sciences seems to be rather neglected in our society. Do you feel that the federal government, particularly the department of Minister François-Philippe Champagne, is doing enough in terms of student scholarships, particularly in the social sciences and humanities research fields?

Ms. Samy-Jane Tremblay: It's important to fund all three areas currently covered by the three research granting agencies, both in the health sciences and in the social sciences and humanities. There can be great advances and innovations in these areas.

It's also important to consider interdisciplinarity. The Bouchard report mentions this. Often, students and professors risk falling between the cracks when applying for grants or scholarships from these agencies. Interdisciplinarity is increasingly fashionable, and a project could target the humanities, but also health sciences, for example. So it's also important to consider that all these areas can go together.

Mr. Sébastien Lemire: To what extent does the gap between the official discourse of the federal government and the results on the ground hinder, on the one hand, the psychological health of students and, on the other hand, their access to the labour market? What are the consequences, what is the price of underfunding for society as a whole?

Ms. Samy-Jane Tremblay: First of all, I would like to—

[English]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Corey Tochor): I'm sorry. We're out of time on this round, but I would ask that you submit a written—

[Translation]

Mr. Sébastien Lemire: I had 15 seconds left of my six minutes. I think the witness has time to give a sufficient answer to my question.

[English]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Corey Tochor): The translation is slow here. The clerk was keeping track, and we are out of time.

I would ask for a written submission please for the—

[Translation]

Mr. Sébastien Lemire: Mr. Chair, I challenge your decision. I had 15 seconds left. That's enough time to answer my question. We can check with the clock.

[English]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Corey Tochor): We can look at the minutes later on, but right now we're going to ask for a written submission. We can review this afterward, but the clerk has informed me that we are out of time.

Now moving on to the next round of questions, we have Mr. Cannings for six minutes.

Mr. Richard Cannings (South Okanagan—West Kootenay, NDP): Thank you all for being here today.

I'm going to start with Ms. Hennessey, if only because when I was a grad student in the mid-seventies, I went to Memorial University in Newfoundland. That was many years ago.

An hon. member: The 1970s?

Mr. Richard Cannings: Yes, it was the 1970s. Have there been any other seventies?

At that time, I had an NRC scholarship. I predate NSERC. In fact, there was no NSERC even then. I had \$7,500 a year. It was enough money to live comfortably. That, of course, went up gradually until 2003, to \$17,500, and it has stayed the same since then, as we've heard here today, through several governments. We've had a Liberal government, the Conservative government and another Liberal government. Nothing has been done for the last 20 years.

It's also been mentioned here that not all grad students live off these scholarships. In fact, it's a minority of grad students. The majority are paid by their professors, who get money through the tri-councils.

I wanted you to explain the importance not only of raising the grad student scholarships by 48%, but of raising the amounts given through the tri-councils to investigators, who can then pay the majority of these grad students.

Ms. Hilary Hennessey: Yes, you raised some great points. It's great to see an alumnus with us today.

Students are not being paid appropriately, and not all students receive funding. I was very lucky to receive funding, but a lot of other students in my faculty do not, and I know a lot of other students across Canada do not have the funding.

It is important to ensure that our students are funded properly, so that they can contribute to research and do the work for the future.

As you mentioned, you were a student in the 1970s. A lot has changed since then, and to have funding match that change in our society would be great, because it would allow students to contribute solely to the research and not have to do a million things in the background to afford the cost of living and their education.

• (1145)

Mr. Richard Cannings: Thank you.

I'm now going to turn to Ms. Metcalfe to talk about some of those changes.

Since 1975, the percentage of university budgets that come from the government has gone down from 75% to somewhere in the 40% range. That difference has been made up predominantly by raising tuition rates. This is another general stress on students—a rise in tuition rates that has been caused directly by a decrease in government funding.

That's for either of you. I don't know who. Whatever light goes on.

Ms. Mackenzy Metcalfe: This raises a very important concern around affordability and post-secondary education.

There has been a decrease in government funding to universities over the last couple of decades. Students have been increasingly paying higher tuition. Also, importantly, international students have been paying significantly higher tuition as well, because very often they're unregulated by the government, whereas domestic students have legislated caps in their provinces for what they can pay for tuition.

With the increases in tuition and the fact that students often enter the housing market at the going rate—so they pay higher costs for housing—students are having an affordability crunch. That goes for undergraduate students as well as the graduate students we're talking about today.

One of the reasons we are focusing specifically on the graduate scholarships and the post-doctoral fellowships is that these awards are seen as the benchmark. They are the most prestigious awards you can get as a student in Canada. It's very difficult for students who are then hired under professors or by their universities to advocate to be paid more money. We think this is an example of where a rising tide will lift all boats. If these scholarships are increased, other students will then benefit from that investment as well.

Mr. Richard Cannings: Okay.

I've also heard data that show that 38% of students who graduate with a Ph.D. here in Canada go outside Canada for their post-doctoral fellowships, partly because of the poor funding here.

When you do some quick “back of the envelope” math, that is a \$640-million loss every year. We have spent all that money in educating these people. They go abroad. Many of them don't come back, because they find much greener pastures in the United States or elsewhere.

I was wondering whether either of you could comment on that.

Ms. Mackenzy Metcalfe: I'm happy to comment on that.

I will say this issue specifically is difficult to quantify, but we found a 2016 survey that found that 47% of early-career health researchers considered moving abroad. Since then, conditions have worsened.

According to the OECD, Canada is second-last in the G7 for investment in research and development by percentage of GDP. What's also important to note is that these graduate students and post-doctoral researchers conduct research in post-secondary education and help with Canada's prestige and reputation in terms of academia.

However, 75% of these Ph.D. students end up in industry. These are the people who create the solutions to challenges like fighting climate change and tackling Canada's housing crisis. We need these people in research and private industry to tackle the challenges we're going to face as a country. If they are going elsewhere, other countries will benefit from the time and effort Canada put into educating these scientists.

Mr. Richard Cannings: Thank you.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Corey Tochor): Thank you so much for that.

Moving on to our five-minute round, we have Mr. Soroka for the Conservatives.

• (1150)

Mr. Gerald Soroka (Yellowhead, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you to the witnesses for coming today.

We've already talked a lot... We definitely know there's a lack of funding in the country. That's not the issue here. I'm more concerned about...

Ms. Metcalfe, you just brought up how almost 50%—probably now 50%—of our graduate students are leaving the country. Would you happen to know, as well, how much of a factor that is in our research? How much less research is potentially being done and how is that affecting our GDP?

Ms. Mackenzy Metcalfe: Unfortunately, I don't have the data to answer that question right now. I'd be happy to follow up with the committee clerk afterwards.

Mr. Gerald Soroka: If you could get that information for us, that would be fantastic.

Ms. Tremblay, you said the Province of Quebec supports its students to a greater degree. Is this because of the French language? Might there not be as many opportunities for French-speaking Canadians outside Quebec, and is that why they do it, or is it just that they treat their students much better than the rest of Canada does?

[Translation]

Ms. Samy-Jane Tremblay: In fact, I think Quebec is a model for research.

Recently, in the last budget, we invested in increasing the amount of student scholarships offered by the Fonds de recherche du Québec. Master's scholarships were increased by \$2,500 and doctoral scholarships were increased by \$4,000. I would like to remind you that, in Quebec, master's scholarships are for two years and doctoral scholarships are for four years. In my opinion, Quebec is a model to follow. The provinces should follow Canada's model, but it is somewhat the opposite at the moment. So I invite Canada to follow the Quebec model.

[English]

Mr. Gerald Soroka: Okay. Thank you for that.

Ms. Hennessey, you mentioned the international students coming in. Do you have any data to show how many of the international students who get either their master's or their doctorate here actually stay in Canada, or don't stay because there is a lack of funding? Do you have any information on that?

Ms. Hilary Hennessey: I want to answer that question with statistics, so I will follow up with the committee clerk to ensure that you have the information needed.

Mr. Gerald Soroka: As well, then, is it possible to find, when it comes to whether they're getting their master's or their doctorate, a comparison of how—I don't want to say poorly—Canada funds its students compared to other countries? Is it possible to get that kind of information as well, doing a comparison between the different countries?

Ms. Hilary Hennessey: It could be, so I will follow up with the committee clerk all that I can gather for you.

Thank you.

Mr. Gerald Soroka: If the other witness had that kind of information, I'd appreciate that as well.

Ms. Metcalfe.

Ms. Mackenzy Metcalfe: Thank you.

I have some of this information on hand, specifically about the recent investment that the United States did through their CHIPS Act. They actually increased the number of equivalent graduate scholarships in the United States by 50%. Those graduate researchers make the equivalent of \$50,000 a year Canadian, compared to \$17,500 for the Canada master's funding.

Mr. Gerald Soroka: I know a bit more about the American program because, unfortunately, I have to admit that my nephew is now at Michigan State University, and the big thing was the amount of money he got paid for a full scholarship to go there. Now he is into his post-doctorate, and he got a significant increase compared

to being in Canada. I can honestly say that the odds of his coming back to Canada now are slim to almost zero.

That's one of the things—we're losing...it's the brain drain. As well, then, what are we losing in education? What are we losing in...? You talked about our commercial side. What kinds of products could we create better or more innovatively, and how much are we losing that way?

I am hoping you can supply that information.

When it comes to other funding, though, do you feel we're losing students—not that they're going elsewhere, but that they're actually just not getting the education? Do you have any information on that?

Ms. Mackenzy Metcalfe: I'm sorry. Can you clarify? Do you mean undergraduate students?

Mr. Gerald Soroka: Yes, any graduate who is going for a doctorate or a master's degree, but there is not enough funding available so they're not actually completing that and they're just staying as a graduate. Do you have any information about that?

Ms. Mackenzy Metcalfe: I don't have any offhand, but I have the statistics that in 2016 a survey found 47% of early career health researchers had seriously considered leaving the country to pursue their education elsewhere, because of financial concerns.

This is something we've been hearing.

I recommend that you ask this question specifically to Sarah, from the Support our Science movement. She is testifying next week, and she has been a great champion for collecting the stories of these graduate students in Canada, highlighting the experiences they have been having, their struggles about securing funding, and the considerations they have while trying to pursue their research in Canada.

• (1155)

Mr. Gerald Soroka: That's probably a great question for her in the future, but today I am just concerned about how many students we could get better educated but who just can't financially afford to move on to the next step. That is a big factor.

Ms. Mackenzy Metcalfe: That's for sure.

Mr. Gerald Soroka: That's it for me.

Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you to the witnesses.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Corey Tochor): We will move on to Mr. Collins for five minutes.

Mr. Chad Collins (Hamilton East—Stoney Creek, Lib.): Thanks, Mr. Chair, and thanks to all the witnesses for appearing today, virtually and in person.

First and foremost what I'll do is cede 15 seconds to my friend across the table, to enable Madame Tremblay to answer his question.

If you want to answer that, then I will give you 15 seconds at this point in time to answer that question.

[Translation]

Ms. Samy-Jane Tremblay: Okay.

According to the Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada, the support that students receive allows them to concentrate fully on their studies in their chosen field. I think this is totally false: students who receive scholarships from research granting agencies cannot concentrate on their studies because the amount offered is simply insufficient.

[*English*]

Mr. Chad Collins: Thanks, Mr. Chair.

Ms. Metcalfe, I'll start with you in terms of some of your recommendations.

You and the other two witnesses have raised some consistent themes here in terms of lack of funding support since 2003. That is some constructive criticism for both governments that have served since that time. I think the recommendations that you, Ms. Tremblay and Ms. Hennessey have provided here today will be consistent themes that we hear from other witnesses.

One thing that I'm looking for from some of the witnesses is recommendations that they might have in mind related to other supports that we could provide, apart from increased scholarship funding and increased financial support for bursaries and fellowships.

I'm looking at housing. You referenced housing twice—once in your opening and once in a response. It's a shared responsibility between all three levels of government. Municipalities, provinces and the federal government have a shared obligation to provide housing supports. To know, as Ms. Hennessey pointed out earlier, that 71% of postgraduate students live below the poverty line.... That is a disturbing figure.

I'm interested in looking at how the federal government can provide financial support through housing incentives or initiatives. Our national housing strategy currently provides funds to universities through the national co-investment fund and the rental construction financing initiative. However, we don't have a specific line for post-secondary institutions in our budget. I think there should be one for the national housing strategy, to assist with the debt that students are taking on.

What are your thoughts on that, in terms of providing other forms of support at the federal level to assist with some of the costs that not just students but all others across the country are experiencing?

Ms. Mackenzy Metcalfe: It's a very timely question.

CASA recently finished authoring a policy paper on this subject, which is going to be released in the next couple of months. I'd be happy to share that with you once it's ready.

The crux of our recommendations actually focus around data collection, because students are not a recognized class of renters in a lot of the data that we have. There are actually some non-government organizations—specifically UTILE in Quebec—that have done national student surveys to fill this gap, but it's difficult as a student organization to make these recommendations when there isn't consistent data from the government to help us identify trends.

Consistent funding through the Canada student grants program is something that students are very concerned about, and it is top of

mind. This is a very important program that specifically targets low-income and middle-income Canadians in their access to post-secondary education. It includes a calculation for housing.

The two recommendations I can provide to you today would be ensuring that this program is consistently funded for those students, and collecting data so that we can help fill some of the other gaps.

Mr. Chad Collins: Thanks very much.

Ms. Hennessey, can I ask you the same as it relates to housing supports for postgrad students?

Ms. Hilary Hennessey: If we adequately supported graduate students through funding, grants and scholarships, we'd be able to alleviate a lot of the stress that comes hand in hand with housing and counselling, for example not having mental health support and access to that.

Again, if students were funded properly, they'd have less financial stress and be able to afford the cost of living, such as rent, all the utilities that come along with that, and groceries. Adequately funding students in one aspect could alleviate all the other external factors.

• (1200)

Mr. Chad Collins: Thank you both for the answers.

Mr. Chair, I think I'm out of time at this point.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Corey Tochor): You have 11 seconds.

Mr. Chad Collins: That's fine.

Thank you.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Corey Tochor): Thank you so much to our witnesses.

We are now at 12 o'clock, so we will be switching over to the next panel—

[*Translation*]

Mr. Sébastien Lemire: Mr. Chair, in the interest of fairness, I would ask you to allow the members of the Bloc Québécois and the NDP to have the floor for two and a half minutes.

[*English*]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Corey Tochor): No. We are at the 12 o'clock mark. We were supposed to stop at 11:55 as per the schedule; we're already five minutes over.

You will have an opportunity—

[Translation]

Mr. Sébastien Lemire: The meeting started late, Mr. Chair, which isn't our fault. In fairness to the Bloc Québécois—

[English]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Corey Tochor): We will wrap up on this panel.

I'd like to thank the witnesses once again for being here today. Take care.

We now stand suspended for a couple of minutes to make sure all of our next witnesses are ready to go.

• (1200) _____ (Pause) _____

• (1200)

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Corey Tochor): Pursuant to Standing Order 108 and the motion adopted by the committee on Tuesday, February 14, 2023, the committee resumes its study on the Government of Canada's graduate scholarship and post-doctoral fellowship programs.

We have our next panel of witnesses. They will be provided with an opening round of five-minute statements and then rounds of questioning to follow.

First up, for the first round of opening comments, we have Sébastien Paquette.

The floor is yours.

• (1205)

[Translation]

Mr. Sébastien Paquette (Union President, Association du personnel de la recherche du Québec): Thank you, Mr. Chair

Hello, everyone.

I'm Sébastien Paquette, and I'm here on behalf of the Association du personnel de la recherche du Québec. The role of the APRQ is to help reduce the precariousness of research personnel and to recognize their contribution to university research throughout Quebec. I was pleased to accept the invitation to testify before the committee on the subject of research funding for post-doctoral researchers. Please note that I no longer use the term “trainee” as it is considered prejudicial and demeaning to our members. Indeed, the term “trainee” has too often been used to legitimize poor working conditions, denying our members recognition as highly qualified research personnel.

What do post-doctoral researchers do on a daily basis? They conduct one or more research projects, be it a purely academic project or an industrial partnership. Because of the experience they have gained in their own doctoral research, post-doctoral researchers supervise students in research internships, at the master's or doctoral level. In some laboratories, students rely on post-doctoral fellows much more than on professors, who are the official supervisors. Post-doctoral researchers are often the ones who write the most scientific papers in a laboratory. In addition, they help professors write the grant applications that guarantee their survival. In short, the tasks are very similar to those of research professionals or early car-

reer professors. There is no doubt that they are needed in a laboratory, and that's why professors wouldn't consider doing without these employees, whose status has only existed since the late 1990s.

However, whether it's through a scholarship from granting agencies or through the research funds of the professors who hire them, which more often than not come from the same granting agencies, the status of post-doctoral researchers remains precarious. This precariousness stems from the nature of the job, which is a transitional period under a fixed-term contract, but also, and above all, from the low amounts of funding. Indeed, the amount of the current scholarships and research funds doesn't generally give post-doctoral students a salary that can compete with what is offered by private industry or other universities in Europe or the United States. In fact, were it not for the recent unionization of post-doctoral researchers, it would likely be more lucrative for them to work for the legislated minimum wage. The current salary for post-doctoral researchers is simply not enough to live on or to attract talent from abroad.

When an older colleague told me about his post-doctoral fellowship in 1996, I realized that the fellowship amounts available today have not kept pace with inflation. Even before the record inflation rates of the last two years, the indexation did not keep up. Scholarship amounts, which become taxable salaries, typically range from \$40,000 to, in very rare cases, \$80,000 per year. From these amounts, universities often subtract employer expenses and some equipment costs, lowering the gross salary amount by about 25% from what was advertised prior to hiring. Unfortunately, the employee won't know this until they begin their employment.

Many post-doctoral researchers work many more hours than they are paid for. This comes with the precarious nature of the job and the need to build a career with good references. Increased scholarships and salary floors therefore remain the best means of ensuring a level of compensation per hour worked that meets the minimum principles of the law. Universities pride themselves on their research reputation, but this reputation wouldn't be possible without the contribution of post-doctoral researchers, and should not be achieved at the cost of precariousness.

Collective agreements negotiated by the unions have resulted in salary floors for post-doctoral fellows. This floor currently ranges from \$33,000 to \$48,000 per year. In some cases, professors who hire post-docs whose scholarship is too low must make up the difference using their research funds. This is still not enough, and not all post-doctoral researchers are fortunate enough to have union protection. Furthermore, having to make up a gap to meet an already low minimum wage is a further indication of the inadequacy of post-doctoral fellowships.

In light of this, I advocate for a massive reinvestment in post-doctoral fellowships, while ensuring a significant increase in project-based funding.

Society should provide post-doctoral researchers with decent working conditions, consistent with their high level of expertise and their essential contribution to the advancement of science and the training of future professionals. This will also make Canadian universities more competitive with other countries, enabling them to attract and retain these highly qualified professionals.

• (1210)

[English]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Corey Tochor): Thank you so much for that.

Moving on to the next witness, we have Mr. Bélanger for five minutes.

The floor is yours.

[Translation]

Mr. Philippe-Edwin Bélanger (President, Canadian Association for Graduate Studies): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I would like to thank the committee for having me here.

I'm the director of graduate studies and student success at the Institut national de la recherche scientifique. INRS is an academic institution dedicated exclusively to research and graduate training. It's one of the 10 institutions that make up the Université du Québec network.

I'm speaking to the committee today in my capacity as president of the Canadian Association for Graduate Studies, a national association that promotes excellence in graduate education and research. Our members include more than 60 Canadian universities and research institutes, as well as many stakeholders with an interest in graduate education.

The association recognizes that the federal government's significant investments in the university research ecosystem, past and present, have contributed significantly to the development of a research culture in Canada. However, the association continues to advocate that the three granting councils obtain the means from the federal government to increase the value of excellence awards and research grants. I must say that the members of the association were expecting a substantial increase in graduate and post-doctoral fellowships and research funding. They were therefore extremely disappointed by the 2023 federal budget and the lack of investment in Canada's university research ecosystem.

Despite numerous calls for action from researchers and student coalitions over the past few years, and against the recommendations of its own advisory committee on the federal research support system, the Government of Canada has decided to ignore Canadian graduate students, post-doctoral researchers and the broader higher education community in its 2023 budget. Federal funding for graduate students and post-doctoral fellows has been stagnant for almost 20 years. Indeed, since 2003, there has been virtually no increase in the value of master's or doctoral scholarships. Due to inflation, tuition increases, and cost-of-living increases, the current

value of scholarships is at or below the national poverty line set by the federal government. The result is therefore damning, as under this system, we are keeping 3,000 of the nation's most talented young scholars below the poverty line.

A comprehensive 2016 study by the University of Montreal found that financial insecurity contributed to alarming rates of mental health problems among university students, from mental illness, alcohol and drug addiction, and an increase in chronic illness and suicide.

In order to address the significant problems associated with research funding in Canada, the Canadian Association for Graduate Studies recommends increasing the number of graduate student awards, significantly increasing the value of research excellence awards and, finally, significantly increasing the value of research grants. This last recommendation would allow faculty to increase the support they provide to students from their grants.

In conclusion, the members of the association remain convinced of the importance of graduate studies to better understand and solve the complex problems facing all Canadians. The availability of high-quality researchers and young scientists is particularly important to the fair, equitable and sustainable development of the country. To achieve this, it is essential that graduate students, post-doctoral researchers and the scientific leaders of tomorrow are supported in a decent manner.

I would like to conclude my remarks by quoting the Honourable François-Philippe Champagne, Minister of Innovation, Science and Industry, in October 2022, in response to petition e-4098, which was tabled in the House of Commons and dealt with funding for higher education:

The Government of Canada also recognizes the importance of investing in post-secondary research, and the critical role that federal scholarships and fellowships play in nurturing and sustaining Canada's top talent through support for career progression and increased financial security and independence.

Today, I want to say to the minister and to the members of the committee that we agree with the minister, but now is the time to act.

• (1215)

[English]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Corey Tochor): Thank you so much for that.

Now, we move on to our last panellist. I'll cede the floor to Madame Mbuya-Bienge for five minutes.

[Translation]

Ms. Cynthia Mbuya-Bienge (President, Syndicat des travailleurs et travailleuses étudiant(es) et postdoctoraux de l'Université Laval, and PhD student in epidemiology): Thank you.

Good afternoon to the members of the committee. It is a real pleasure for me to have the opportunity to speak to you today in my home region.

Before I begin, I would like to acknowledge that we are on the unceded territory of the Algonquin Anishinabe nation, and I would like to thank my colleagues for their interventions.

I'm Cynthia Mbuya-Bienge. I'm the president of the student and post-doctoral workers union at Laval University in Quebec City. I'm also a doctoral student in epidemiology, and I have personal experience with the Government of Canada's graduate scholarship programs.

I would like to begin by thanking the committee for bringing this motion to the House, as it is particularly relevant in this time of historic inflation, which disproportionately affects the most vulnerable population groups. Among these vulnerable segments of the population are students and post-doctoral fellows. Therefore, in my presentation, I will discuss the effects of the scholarship system on the living conditions of graduate students and post-doctoral fellows.

First, although the federal government provides several hundred million dollars annually in graduate scholarships, this amount is no longer sufficient, and the living conditions of students are precarious. To support this statement, let me illustrate our daily lives. Being a master's or doctoral student means doing full-time research work—well over 40 hours a week—and working on weekends. To support themselves, many students combine several contracts, which can lead to burnout and even academic failure, as we know that research requires a high number of publications to succeed in the field. These working conditions have a significant impact on the family-study balance, as well as on the physical and psychological health of students. In fact, according to the latest report by the Union étudiante du Québec, whose president appeared here before me, 58% of university students suffer from psychological distress.

However, since 2003, the amount of federal scholarships has remained unchanged at \$35,000 per year for a doctoral student and \$17,500 for a master's student. Given that the after-tax low-income cut-off in Canada for a single person living in a city of 500,000 or more is \$22,060 and that the majority of Canadian universities are located in large cities, there is no doubt that these amounts are no longer adequate to provide students with an adequate standard of living. If we add to this the fact that many doctoral students have families to support, the \$35,000 amount, which seems high at first glance, is no longer sufficient given the reality of students.

The objective of the Canada graduate scholarships is to promote excellence by supporting students in their research careers and allowing them to benefit from a high-quality training experience. It's important to remember that the scientific work of students has an impact on all areas of society, from understanding the development of disease to the environmentally responsible use of energy sources and the improvement of health care systems. However, with the current scholarship amounts, we have to wonder whether this goal is really being met.

We should also note the important contribution of international students, who represent nearly 30% of post-secondary students in

Canadian universities and who contribute greatly to the social and economic development of the country, but who do not have access to these scholarships.

However, the major granting agencies in health, science, engineering and the social sciences and humanities operate a scholarship system that is often difficult to understand and that gives rise to many misunderstandings. Indeed, I would like to focus here on the distribution of the number of scholarships among the three agencies and how the quota used for the distribution of scholarships by university is determined. Moreover, while there is much talk of new measures of equity, diversity and inclusion in these systems, these measures remain vague and abstract.

Finally, the amounts of Canada post-doctoral fellowship programs vary from competition to competition, ranging from \$45,000 per year for two years for the Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council and the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council to \$70,000 per year for two years for the Banting fellowships. Unfortunately, these amounts have not evolved nearly as fast as inflation over the last few decades, thus contributing to the impoverishment of post-doctoral fellows. It should be noted that post-docs are recognized as highly skilled workers, given their demanding training and ability to conduct research. The minimum awards for post-doctoral researchers do not reflect this, as they are far below the entry-level salary of a professional with a PhD in Canada. With this in mind, not only should the amounts of the various fellowship competitions be standardized, but a real increase in the amounts of post-doctoral fellowships should be considered.

In view of the arguments presented, I support the motion to undertake a study of the Government of Canada's graduate and post-doctoral fellowship programs, and I invite the government to substantially improve these programs.

• (1220)

[English]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Corey Tochor): Thank you so much for that.

Now we'll have some rounds of questioning.

Opening up for the six-minute round, we have Mr. Lobb.

Mr. Ben Lobb: Thank you very much, Mr. Tochor. My first question is for Mr. Bélanger.

Is there a number, a financial dollar ask, so that you could say, "If there were this many more dollars for the tri-council's granting system, that would fix the problem"? Among all your colleagues from province to province, is there an agreed-upon number there?

[Translation]

Mr. Philippe-Edwin Bélanger: The value of scholarships hasn't increased in over 20 years, or so, and it is around \$20,000. The Canada graduate scholarship competition offers \$35,000 awards. However, the normal awards from the federal councils, such as the Canada graduate scholarship program at the doctoral level run by the Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada, are still at \$21,000. So my recommendation—

[English]

Mr. Ben Lobb: What I'm asking is, do you need a billion dollars more from the federal government; do you need \$500 million or you need \$10? What's the number?

[Translation]

Mr. Philippe-Edwin Bélanger: We would have to do some simulations, but I can tell you that \$20,000 in 2000 is equivalent to \$35,000 today. I therefore believe that the reference value of doctoral scholarships should be increased to \$35,000. As a result of this correction, these amounts should be indexed. Indeed, leaving the value of an award fixed over time creates inequity between the cohorts of students who are studying below the poverty line and those who benefit from the correction on the day it is made.

Therefore, I invite Parliament to evaluate the possibility of correcting the value of scholarships and, subsequently, to put in place a system of indexation to avoid finding ourselves in the same situation in 10 or 15 years.

[English]

Mr. Ben Lobb: I notice that in some of the universities' annual reports they make mention of the fiscal disparity that is experienced by the research people and the post-doctoral fellows, etc., but I find it odd—and it's not a criticism of you—that with all those billions of dollars in annual budgets at these universities, they can't come to the federal government and say, “We need another billion dollars to make this happen.”

Is that not a little odd to you?

[Translation]

Mr. Philippe-Edwin Bélanger: With all due respect, I think you're mixing up two things in your question. You're talking about the operation of universities and the direct support offered to students in these universities. In my opinion, these are two very different things and—

[English]

Mr. Ben Lobb: In fairness, though, if there are 2,000 of these research and post-doctoral fellows across the country and you have all of these universities and they know it's an issue, wouldn't they be able to work together—they already have all these associations—and say, “Yes, Ms. Freeland, we need \$500 million more in annual dollars”?

I know the study, and it's a good study, but we all know that it's more. We know how much more, but we don't know the total.

[Translation]

Mr. Philippe-Edwin Bélanger: The position of the Canadian Association for Graduate Studies is very simple: the value of schol-

arships should be increased to keep pace with the cost of living, which should have been done 20 or 25 years ago. The association also believes that research grants to faculty should be increased to allow them to provide adequate financial support to the students they supervise.

Obviously, if the federal government decides to close its granting councils and redirect the money to the universities, something different can be done. At the moment, research funding isn't going directly to the universities, but to the federal granting councils.

• (1225)

[English]

Mr. Ben Lobb: I have another question before my time runs out.

I always wonder, when we look at these universities...and I don't begrudge any of the higher-ups at these universities their big wages. I don't begrudge them—whatever they want to make.

My question is, and I'm sure that among your colleagues you must wonder.... There are the professors, and then there's this huge sea of administration, and at some of these universities it's hundreds of millions of dollars a year in salaries. Do you think the universities should take a look at their annual...?

I'm not talking about the professors but about the administration and all the staff. Should they look at that, too, and say to the federal government, “Look, we're going to take a look at our billion-dollar budgets at our universities”—in some cases, multi-billion dollar budgets—“and we're going to get some of our house in order here, and then we'd like you to fund these.” What do you think? You must talk about this.

[Translation]

Mr. Philippe-Edwin Bélanger: University funding is a provincial responsibility, and I don't know the situation in every province in Canada. However, I can tell you that in Quebec, if there were a cleanup to be done—

[English]

Mr. Ben Lobb: You can talk about the administration at a university. That's very much dependent on—

[Translation]

Mr. Philippe-Edwin Bélanger: Yes, absolutely.

However, I wanted to tell you that, in Quebec, between 2012 and 2015, major cuts were made to university budgets and a major cleanup was done.

[English]

Mr. Ben Lobb: Is that in administration? I don't imagine there have been cuts in the administration budget.

[Translation]

Mr. Philippe-Edwin Bélanger: Yes, there were indeed budget cuts in Quebec universities. Their financial situation is very precarious, as it is in several Canadian provinces.

[English]

Mr. Ben Lobb: How much time is left?

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Corey Tochor): You have 31 seconds.

Mr. Ben Lobb: In all good sport, I will donate that to my colleagues in the Bloc and the NDP. How about that for collegiality?

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Corey Tochor): That's fabulous. That shows some team work.

Now moving on to the second MP for this round, we have Mr. Sousa for six minutes.

The floor is yours.

Mr. Charles Sousa (Mississauga—Lakeshore, Lib.): Thank you, Chair.

Thanks to all three of you for being here to discuss this important issue and the motion put forward recognizing the challenges that you have all reaffirmed.

There's a lack of funding. There's a desire to see the research, the importance.... You have referenced, Monsieur Bélanger, this government's desire to improve our whole capacity around research to ensure that we're competitive worldwide and to ensure that we attract the best and the brightest and retain them here as well.

That's obviously a theme we recognize. We want to discuss it. We want to elaborate on how we can produce better results.

I take some caution in the question I just received. We also have to redirect our funding in an effective way so as to manage it fiscally, so we can ensure that we're appropriating dollars effectively.

Cynthia, are we attracting more foreign students? Is there a desire to come to Canada? You talked about 30% being the number right now. Is that still holding strong?

[Translation]

Ms. Cynthia Mbuya-Bienge: It's important to understand that over the last few decades, the picture of higher education has really changed. Today, a good portion of students are international students and they still want to come to Canada. However, once in Canada, they face challenges that are different from those of Canadian students. These challenges aren't taken into account in the scholarship systems and the way they are currently designed.

[English]

Mr. Charles Sousa: I recognize that our education system is somewhat of an economic basis for an entry into Canada. We are a strongly sought-after jurisdiction because of our education and our ability to provide great academic excellence, and we attract foreign students, who pay the lion's share of tuition to come here. It's also a benefit to the universities, so we want to continue to strengthen that.

Monsieur Bélanger, I want to build on some of what my colleague has referenced here in terms of funding. I'm interested in that number. I really want to know. Some of your recommendations are that we need to increase the number of applications that are requested and we need to increase the value of some of those scholarships.

How much more are we looking for? How much more are you proposing in terms of the numbers and then the valuations?

• (1230)

[Translation]

Mr. Philippe-Edwin Bélanger: As far as the total bill is concerned, I don't have a clear idea of the figure. I spoke to you earlier about the adjustment of the value of the scholarships that have been awarded for 20 or 25 years in Quebec and in Canada.

There is a tool from the Bank of Canada that is very simple to use. It allows you to calculate the value in today's dollars of a sum of money at a given time. So I would invite all of you to visit this website. It is very interesting. For example, \$20,000 in 2000 is worth almost \$35,000 today.

I think your three granting councils already have simulations, I presume. It would be interesting to ask them what scenarios they have in mind to increase the value of the awards to reflect the needs of graduate students in Canada.

[English]

Mr. Charles Sousa: To build on that issue, you're requesting greater value on the individual scholarships and the individual ability, too, because of issues of mental health and the ability to stand up to the CPI and the cost of living that's happening.

What about the actual number of scholarships? By increasing the number of scholarships and increasing the value, we're asking a tremendous amount, so I think it's important for us to understand what you would like.

[Translation]

Mr. Philippe-Edwin Bélanger: We want both. We want an increase in the value and number of scholarships.

[English]

Mr. Charles Sousa: That comes with an equation with a dollar value, right?

[Translation]

Mr. Philippe-Edwin Bélanger: Yes.

We therefore recommend that scenarios be evaluated to increase the number of scholarships granted to graduate students and to correct the historical error that was imposed on our researchers by letting them live in a situation of extreme poverty for years by not having indexed their scholarships. Who here today would agree to having their income remain fixed for 25 years? What minister, deputy minister, member of Parliament, or university administrator would agree to have their salary frozen for 25 years? No one would agree to that. The answer is obvious.

You're asking me for specific figures on what this represents. My answer is that the federal government has three granting councils with many employees, who would certainly be able to provide you with scenarios if you want information on the effect of increasing the value and number of awards. As a representative of a Canadian university association that aims to promote excellence in higher education, I can tell you that if we want to continue to do that and deal with the challenges in Canada, increasing the number of graduate students and making sure that they are well taken care of would be a good way to do it.

Now, in terms of the final total cost, I would encourage you to consult your advisors.

[*English*]

Mr. Charles Sousa: Am I done, Chair?

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Corey Tochor): You have four seconds, three seconds....

Moving to the next member, we have, from the Bloc, Mr. Lemire.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Sébastien Lemire: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I would like to mention that I did some checking: my speech began at 11:36 and 48 seconds, and you interrupted me at 11:42 and 28 seconds, which is still 20 seconds if we add up the two and a half minutes. That's almost three minutes to ask questions. Why do I want to point this out to you? Because it has an impact on these brave young women who came to testify. We weren't able to ask questions on a fundamental issue for Quebec during those three minutes.

Having said that, I turn to the other problem of widespread underfunding of research.

Mr. Bélanger, a Radio-Canada report broadcast yesterday, May 3, informed us that an analysis of grant applications over the past 30 years, in which Acfas participated, established essentially three facts: science in English is taking the lion's share of the funding granted; the number of francophones writing research projects in French has plummeted over the past 30 years; and, in health, grant applications in French are generally rejected.

The fact that English-language science gets the lion's share of funding is a key point and a concern. Do you agree that more money needs to be set aside for French-language research and that the minister needs to take direct action to massively increase French-language funding, which is in a critical state?

Mr. Philippe-Edwin Bélanger: I would have to see the fine details of the investigation. Not having seen it in detail, it's difficult for me to take a position today.

I know for a fact that French-speaking researchers and students choose to submit applications in English because they feel that they will be better evaluated by the councils and evaluation committees. Now, does this mean that these students are working in English or that this research is being conducted in English? I don't know.

The challenge of science in French isn't new. English is the language of science all over the world. If you go to Sweden, Germany, laboratories often conduct their work in English.

• (1235)

Mr. Sébastien Lemire: Since researchers are often funded on the basis of scientific publications, Rémi Quirion, Quebec's chief scientist, was talking about the possibility of creating a multidisciplinary French-language journal. Do you think that Ottawa should invest in this project, which would allow the French language to shine more on a national and international scale, which would eventually have an effect on the grants given to francophone researchers?

Mr. Philippe-Edwin Bélanger: I think any action that can help promote science in French would be a good action, and it would certainly be something we would support.

The Canadian Association for Graduate Studies is a bilingual association, and we're making more and more room for the French language, whether in our working sessions or in our annual conferences.

A French-language multidisciplinary scientific journal would indeed be interesting, but we mustn't forget that the French language can also be a barrier to scientific dissemination in some cases. I'm thinking, for example, of a physicist who decides to publish his thesis or dissertation in French. He could certainly do so as a French speaker, but this would probably mean that his work would remain on the shelf.

Mr. Sébastien Lemire: You're right, which is why it's important to increase the amounts granted for the translation of this research. This is an essential objective. I would like to add that an open letter from researcher Serge Payette was published today. In it, he explains that in Canadian scientific journals that have their publication managed by the National Research Council of Canada—a federal agency—abstracts in French have been removed since December 2012, which has contributed to the dominance of English in these publications.

I would also like to hear your opinion on the issue of psychological health. I think there's a direct link between the \$20,000 you're talking about that hasn't been indexed since 2003 and the impact on all students, particularly those enrolled in doctoral programs. We see that these students have to deal with challenges such as isolation, pressure, publication, overwork and depression, in addition to economic stress. What is the impact of the amount of the scholarship on mental health and the pursuit of studies?

Mr. Philippe-Edwin Bélanger: The University of Montreal survey that I mentioned earlier speaks volumes on this subject. We know that there's a direct link between financial insecurity and mental health problems. There is a mental health crisis among graduate students. There is no doubt that the financial precariousness of our graduate students, whose scholarships haven't been indexed for over 20 years, contributes to exacerbating mental health problems.

Mr. Sébastien Lemire: Ms. Mbuya-Bienge, I have a spouse who is a doctoral student at Laval University. I know how difficult the challenges of pursuing a degree can be. I would like your opinion on the link between psychological support and the amount of the scholarships.

Ms. Cynthia Mbuya-Bienge: Since the end of the pandemic, students' mental health problems have certainly been acute. The 58% of the student population that is reported to be suffering from psychological distress, which I mentioned earlier, was in the pre-pandemic period. We can only imagine the current numbers. As my colleague said, there is a direct correlation between the living conditions dictated by the funding students receive and their mental health. One factor plays on the other. Leaving grant amounts at their current levels does not allow students to improve their mental health.

In addition, there are already too many demands on university support programs. Laval University offers a mental health coaching program for students, but the waiting list is extremely long. The needs of students aren't being met, which makes them even more critical, especially in a post-pandemic context, when there is increased isolation and reduced teamwork. This is really an issue that needs to be addressed, and one way to do that is to increase funding for students.

• (1240)

Mr. Sébastien Lemire: Thank you.

Mr. Chair, thank you for giving me more time.

[*English*]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Corey Tochor): Thank you so much. That is 31 seconds over.

We're going to go on to Mr. Cannings for the final six-minute spot.

Mr. Richard Cannings: Thank you, all, for being here today.

I'm going to start with Mr. Bélanger.

On Monday, here, we had a walkout of graduate students across the country. Thousands of them here in Ottawa showed up on Parliament Hill. On Tuesday, we had Science Meets Parliament. I don't know if that was a coincidence or what, but we had top young researchers here on Parliament Hill. We had a reception with people like Dr. Mona Nemer, Canada's chief science adviser, and Frédéric Bouchard, who chaired and wrote the report on the Canadian research ecosystem. That report was put forward by this government.

I talked to all of them. There was just a general consensus that this question of increasing the funding of postgraduate students is such low-hanging fruit, such an obvious thing. Everybody was shocked that nothing had been done in the budget.

When I look at Dr. Bouchard's report and the U15 budget asks, I see that they are more or less the same. They want an increase of 10% per year for the next five years for research funding in Canadian universities and 5% per year for the next five years after that, and that is just to catch up to the United States and other countries.

We talk about how this is a lot of money. Well, we are falling behind. This is the information world, where we have to make these investments or Canada will be left as a backwater in the world.

I'm just wondering if you could comment on those reports—Dr. Bouchard's report and the U15 asks, what the grad students are asking. Just put it in context with what's happening in the United States. Finland was mentioned.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Philippe-Edwin Bélanger: The position of the Canadian Association for Graduate Studies is very clear. After the 2023 budget was announced, we issued a press release, which is perfectly aligned with the Bouchard report and which also takes into account the criticisms that were made by U15 Canada and the Association francophone pour le savoir, or Acfas. It's funny that you mention them.

For all the people we talk to, the solution is so simple: increase the value of the scholarships. As I was saying earlier, who would agree to having their pay frozen for 25 years? Nobody would agree to that.

Second, Canada is indeed in competition with other countries. The United States was mentioned, but there are also Germany, Sweden and other European countries that offer higher scholarships.

However, what concerns me more than the competitiveness of the Canadian university system is really the well-being of the students who are here and to whom we have a moral duty to offer the best possible conditions of study. By freezing the salaries of our scholars for 25 years, we've failed in our moral obligation to appropriately support young adults who wish to train to develop the Canada of tomorrow.

[*English*]

Mr. Richard Cannings: I'd like to turn to Ms. Mbuya-Bienge.

You mentioned the fact that post-doctoral scholarships and fellowships don't match up with.... A person with a doctoral degree is a very highly trained person who could go into the marketplace and get a job in industry, and they are finding out what they would be paid there versus what they're being paid at a post-doc.

Can you elaborate on what that difference would look like?

[*Translation*]

Ms. Cynthia Mbuya-Bienge: The average salary for an entry-level post-doctoral position in Canada is approximately \$70,000. It should be noted that not all post-doctoral fellowships are given to all post-docs. Only some get them, and salaries for post-docs who have a collective agreement can sometimes be below minimum wage. That's the minimum that some post-docs get. So the gap is huge. There are people who have studied up to the PhD level to contribute astronomically to research in Canada, but who receive less than minimum wage.

However, it affects attractiveness. People don't want to spend years studying if their salary doesn't match their skills. We have to manage to close this gap if we want to not only attract people from abroad to produce Canadian knowledge, but also keep our people here so that they can contribute to reducing the research gap that's being created between other countries and Canada.

• (1245)

[*English*]

Mr. Richard Cannings: I'll just add a comment to that.

I was just talking with biomedical researchers before I came to this meeting. One of them gave an example of how one of his students left Canada and went to the University of Arkansas to do a post-doc, not only because of the amount of money he would be getting but also because of the consistency in that funding over the years. He said it was not comparable at all to what he would get in Canada.

I'll just leave it at that.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Corey Tochor): Thank you so much, Mr. Cannings.

We move now to the next five-minute round. We have Mr. Mazier.

Mr. Dan Mazier: Thank you for coming out here.

Mr. Bélanger, I'm fascinated by all the different subjects you've spoken about here, especially when it comes to the funding mechanism and the exchange you had with Mr. Lobb.

We talked about needing the government to increase these rates, yet the funding has increased to the universities, quite obviously. Is that right? Let's say a professor or a researcher gets \$1 million in funding. In the application, does it say they have to pay \$17,500—and that's it—to the master's student, for example? What is stopping the researcher from actually paying that student more?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Philippe-Edwin Bélanger: There is no constraint that prevents professors-researchers from paying more for students and post-doctoral researchers. In fact, in most universities, professors can give them financial support at their discretion. There's a lot of talk about federal granting council awards, but faculty who receive grants also give money.

If these grants aren't indexed, faculty will have access to the same amount of grant money, but will have difficulty keeping pace with income indexing for students. Council grant programs haven't been indexed either, and haven't been for a long time. A grant that

was worth \$1 million in 2000 would be worth much more today. The problem is that today, \$1 million is still being paid out. So if the professor decides to give a lot more money to his students, he may compromise some of his research activities or he may have to make choices about research programming.

I think there's a link: If the awards are indexed, then the research grants to the faculty in our universities should be indexed as well.

[*English*]

Mr. Dan Mazier: I agree. I think the balance needs to be much greater. You hit a really good point there.

Also, you talked about the funding. Of course, the 2023 budget did not increase the funding at all. It missed your several asks. For how many years have you been asking for this increase to post-grads?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Philippe-Edwin Bélanger: The Canadian Association for Graduate Studies has been asking for an increase in scholarships since 2017. It's making this request as part of the pre-budget consultations.

[*English*]

Mr. Dan Mazier: You've been asking for six years.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Philippe-Edwin Bélanger: Yes.

[*English*]

Mr. Dan Mazier: It still wasn't addressed this year.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Philippe-Edwin Bélanger: That's right.

[*English*]

Mr. Dan Mazier: Among all the money that's been spent, that's interesting.

Ms. Mbuya-Bienge, you said that immigrants come in and seem surprised. They want to come to Canada, but then they're surprised; they're taken aback. Why are they surprised? What is the most shocking thing they find when they come to Canada?

• (1250)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Cynthia Mbuya-Bienge: I will speak about the members of the union I represent, because I know their situation best.

Not all international students have access to funding. Grant research funding is only available to the cream of the crop, whether it's Canadian or international. Federal government scholarships are available for international students to come to Canada, but only a small fraction of them have access to them.

Upon arrival in Canada, other students face not only the challenges of adapting to a new culture and education system, but also the lack of available support. Again, international students contribute a great deal to university funding, but don't receive the same level of contribution from universities. This would allow them to grow in the Canadian education system.

[English]

Mr. Dan Mazier: You mentioned in your comments before—and I'm not trying to put words in your mouth—that they were surprised. They don't have the supports. Obviously, they were misled, they figure. They're surprised by something.

This is basically a federal application, so where was the miscommunication? Where did they get misinformed? Why were they so surprised? Whose responsibility is that? Is it the federal government's?

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Corey Tochor): I'm sorry, we're going to have to request a written response. You're 12 seconds over, and we want to get to the two-and-a-half-minute rounds without too much complaining from the members today.

Moving on, we are going to the Liberals and Mr. Van Bynen.

Mr. Tony Van Bynen (Newmarket—Aurora, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair. I appreciate the opportunity to sit in on the discussions here today.

I'd like to put some things into context. We're making constant comparisons to what's available in the United States. A cursory review has indicated that the average cost of a master's degree is between \$20,000 to \$30,000 a year, as compared to Canada, where it's \$17,000 a year. I'd like to put that into context in terms of using those comparisons. Let's use them on both sides.

The other thing as well, as a matter of record, is that we keep hearing that nothing has been done in terms of supporting students in education. In budget 2023, \$813 million was committed to enhancing financial assistance to students. That includes student loan grants being increased by 40%. In the previous budget, any repayment of student loans would not be required if their income was less than \$40,000, and the maximum amount of repayment for a student to the student loan was reduced to 10% of their income, from 20%.

In addition to that, we also introduced \$30,000 in loan forgiveness for nurses and \$60,000 in loan forgiveness for doctors.

I'd like to put this in the context of the overall support for education. I acknowledge that this is not in the scope of this study, but I think this information should also be a consideration as we go forward.

Having said that, I will turn the balance of my time over to my colleague, Mr. Lauzon.

[Translation]

Mr. Stéphane Lauzon: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'd like to thank the witnesses for being here.

For the record, I understand that Mr. Lemire wasn't here during the last studies we did. There was one on French-language research,

and his colleague from his party who was here at the time participated in that. A lot of the data and questions are related to that study rather than to funding.

Mr. Bélanger, you gave us a lead by suggesting that things would have to be done differently if the funding came directly from the universities. So we're dealing directly with the funding system itself. Can you tell us what a funding system administered directly by the universities might look like?

Mr. Philippe-Edwin Bélanger: I didn't say that I thought it was desirable. However, I thought that there was a sort of causal link between the question of one of your colleagues on the increase in grants and the possibility of funding going directly through the universities. Between the decisions of Parliament and the redistribution that you make to research, there is an intermediate level, composed of the federal granting councils, whose work and existence I don't question.

• (1255)

Mr. Stéphane Lauzon: So, you're very clearly saying that you agree that it should go through the federal councils and that they should be the ones to distribute the grants.

Mr. Philippe-Edwin Bélanger: I think this would allow us to keep a distance between the political sphere and the research sector. So I want to make it absolutely clear: the Canadian Association for Graduate Studies does not recommend in any way—

Mr. Stéphane Lauzon: It's important for me to put this on the record for today's meeting, and it's also important to distinguish between this study and the one the committee did on research in French.

You piqued my interest by saying that in other countries it was possible to study in French and that in Quebec it was possible to do research in French. However, in its other study, the committee looked at publication. Publication is one thing, but research is another.

Are we blocking or preventing students from doing research in French in Quebec and everywhere in Canada where French is spoken? I also invite Ms. Mbuya-Bienge to answer my question if she wishes.

Mr. Philippe-Edwin Bélanger: Your question has several parts to it.

If I go back to the councils again, I think the main concern of Quebec universities and francophone universities in general is to ensure that applications for scholarships and grants submitted in French are properly evaluated, which we still have doubts about. The committees are certainly bilingual, but sometimes there aren't many people who can understand the documents submitted as part of the grant applications.

Mr. Stéphane Lauzon: This justifies the importance of having francophone members on these committees.

Mr. Philippe-Edwin Bélanger: Yes.

As for the distinction you make between the language of publication and the language of research, there is indeed a very important nuance. It's possible to work in a French laboratory and produce scientific literature in English. In my opinion—

Mr. Stéphane Lauzon: In this context, the reason we produce in English rather than only in French is perhaps that we want to reach more G20 countries to be better included in the system and—

Mr. Philippe-Edwin Bélanger: It's to ensure better dissemination of research work.

Mr. Stéphane Lauzon: Yes.

Do you think that, financially, students—

[*English*]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Corey Tochor): I'm sorry to interrupt. We are 20 seconds over already, and we're trying to get the last round in to make everyone happy.

Moving on to the MP from the Bloc, we have Mr. Lemire for two and a half minutes.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Sébastien Lemire: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I would like to thank Mr. Collins for asking the question earlier, and Mr. Lobb for his openness.

I want to respond to what Mr. Lauzon is saying. There are implications. According to information published on the CBC website on independent funding, 98% of the total funding from the Canadian Institutes of Health Research goes to research in English. The figure is 81% for the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council and 96% for the Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council. This strong bias on the part of independent bodies has a very significant impact. The link can be made to initiatives such as Bill C-13 and its impact on the funding of English-language advocacy organizations in Quebec. This is a step backwards for the French language, and I absolutely cannot support it.

I'd like to hear from you on the issue of the psychological health of your members and underfunding. What impact does underfunding have on your members?

Mr. Sébastien Paquette: I don't have the exact figures. However, I remember seeing a survey circulated during the pandemic. We were at 64% of university students with mental health issues. I can't say it's the same numbers for post-docs, but I think the level is high as well. If you look at the level of funding for post-docs who are fortunate enough to be unionized, the salary floor, which is the minimum salary the university has to pay them, ranges from \$33,000 to \$48,000. The research professor can pay more, but there isn't necessarily an incentive to do so.

Earlier we were talking about the level of funding, but you also have to look at it on a project basis. The professor-researcher is given funding for a project. At the end, if he has not met his commitments, his funding won't be renewed. So, if he gets \$130,000 to pay post-docs, is he going to choose to pay two at \$60,000 each or three at \$40,000? The answer is simple. He will choose to pay three at \$40,000 because he'll want more papers produced. Meanwhile,

those three \$40,000 students are going to be working under difficult conditions.

If this continues, minimum wage will catch up with our post-docs' salaries. Certainly, this raises a mental health issue. When you're a post-doc, in your 30s, that's often when you start a family. But starting a family on \$40,000 a year isn't easy. A lot of post-docs come from abroad, so they come with their spouses, who don't necessarily have the ability to find a job in the—

• (1300)

Mr. Sébastien Lemire: I have to stop you if I want my colleague from the NDP to ask his questions.

[*English*]

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Corey Tochor): We are 15 seconds over. I apologize again.

We're going to go on to the last round of questioning, from Mr. Cannings, for two and a half minutes.

Mr. Richard Cannings: Thank you.

I'm going to continue with Mr. Paquette. You mentioned that with the post-doctoral fellowships and grants, the amounts set the standard—this is the way I understood it—of what the researchers would pay if they were also paying their post-docs. The amounts set by the tri-councils in their post-doctoral fellowships—

[*Translation*]

Mr. Sébastien Paquette: In the case of scholarships, it is indeed the research councils that set the amounts. However, post-doctoral fellows are often Mitacs fellowships at the Canadian level. The typical income for Mitacs fellows is \$40,000 plus \$5,000 for equipment. Some awards are higher.

For example, one of my colleagues at one point received a \$53,000 award. However, when he was awarded it, what he wasn't told was that employer expenses would be deducted from it, and they are typically 13% to 20% of the total, depending on the job. So my colleague was paid less than \$45,000 per year, when he was promised \$53,000 gross income.

This is another problem and is something that isn't announced to the post-doc before they take the job. That should be clear. If not, the award should be announced, but then supplements for employer charges should be added so that the university can pay the post-doc the amount announced, without breaking its word.

[*English*]

Mr. Richard Cannings: Could you just clarify? Did you say some post-doctorals have to pay for the equipment and materials that they need?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Sébastien Paquette: A portion of the amount is for equipment. As I was saying, the salary for Mitacs fellows is \$40,000 plus \$5,000 for equipment. If there are additional purchases to be made, faculty will often subtract the cost of those from that amount because they have not budgeted that cost in their research funds for that project. In effect, the project is planned based on the award that comes from the granting agency.

[*English*]

Mr. Richard Cannings: Thank you.

The Vice-Chair (Mr. Corey Tochor): Thank you so much to our witnesses and to members for their insightful questions.

That concludes our committee for today.

We will be meeting on Tuesday, May 9 to resume the study of the Government of Canada's graduate scholarship and post-doctoral fellowship programs.

It being now past the time of adjournment of one o'clock, this meeting now stands as adjourned.

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