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Budget 2018 Consultations

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300-275 Bank, Ottawa, ON K2P 2L6
www.ideas-idees.ca



“I truly believe that one of Canada’s key strategic advantages is our social science and humanities. Social science and humanities researchers provide evidence for sound policy making and train the next generation of critical thinkers.”

– Kirsty Duncan, Minister of Science, speaking at Congress 2017

SUMMARY

As the Canadian economy becomes increasingly service-oriented, knowledge-driven and globally connected, our ability to produce and use people-centred knowledge will play a growing role in our future prosperity. But Canada’s research spending performance has declined significantly relative to peer countries. Canada’s Fundamental Science Review provides a robust plan on how to build a truly world-leading research system capable of generating the discovery and innovation needed to support a resilient, productive population and innovative, competitive firms.

The Federation for the Humanities and Social Sciences is a national non-profit organization that represents Canada’s 91,000 researchers and graduate students in the humanities and social sciences. The Federation was an active participant in the consultations that informed the Science Review, and we strongly support the advisory panel’s recommendations. In particular, we encourage the Government of Canada to:

1. Make long-term investments in the federal granting agencies to reverse declines in Canada’s research performance

A well-funded fundamental research system is essential to economic growth and innovation. The Federation supports the Science Review panel’s recommendation to put in place a multi-year funding plan that includes a \$485-million increase over the current base over the next four years to support investigator-led research via the granting agencies.

2. Take steps to improve balance across disciplines in the research funding system

Given the fundamental drivers of a knowledge-based economy, new research funding must include steps to improve the balance within the federal research funding system with particular attention to humanities and social science research. To accomplish this goal, future funding increases for Canada’s research councils should be provided equally across the three granting agencies until a more equitable balance has been achieved.

3. Improve support for multidisciplinary and international research

Given the complex and global nature of many of our most pressing challenges, the Federation supports the Science Review panel’s recommendations to develop multi-agency strategies to support multidisciplinary and international research collaborations. Dedicated funding should be devoted to support programs in these areas.

4. Support reconciliation with Indigenous peoples in the post-secondary education sector

The Government of Canada should provide increased funding to programs that support access to post-secondary education for Indigenous students, including at the K-12 level; new financial support for Indigenous students at the graduate and post-graduate levels to help develop new Indigenous scholars; and dedicated funding to support programs within the granting councils to ensure long-term success of research undertaken by and with Indigenous peoples.

COMPETITIVENESS AND PRODUCTIVITY

Key contributions from the humanities and social sciences

Scholarship in the humanities and social sciences helps produce the knowledge and skills necessary for a dynamic, inclusive and innovative economy:

Essential skill development: About half of Canada’s post-secondary students are enrolled in humanities and social science programs. The training these students receive provides them with capabilities Canadian firms need in today’s economy, including leadership skills, talents related to working in teams, and the ability to analyze complex information, think creatively and communicate effectively.¹

Advancing the human elements of innovation: Researchers in the humanities and social sciences are producing new knowledge in key innovation areas such as design, user experience and inter-cultural communication. Knowledge of human thinking, behaviour and relationships also enhances our ability to incorporate new technologies into our everyday lives and to help us adapt to the changes new technology brings. For example, implementing bio-medical and AI-based innovations requires development of effective legal frameworks, ethical practices and cultural norms.

Addressing complex challenges: Canada is increasingly faced with highly complex challenges – such as climate change, inequality and reconciliation with Indigenous peoples – that cannot be solved through technical knowledge or insight from the physical sciences alone. Knowledge generated from humanities and social science research is needed to address the important psychological, social, historical and cultural factors that shape these challenges.

Supporting a cohesive, democratic society: Canada’s long-term productivity and competitiveness depend on our ability to maintain a cohesive society supported by a healthy federal democracy, where Canadians with different backgrounds and beliefs are able to collaborate effectively in their professional, political and personal lives. In particular, much work remains to support meaningful social participation among marginalized groups. In an era of rapid technological and social change, new knowledge from the humanities and social sciences will be needed to maintain crucial social foundations such as trusted public institutions, effective public policies, healthy communities and strong cultural connections.

The report by the Science Review panel recognizes the vital contributions made by the humanities and social sciences. The report presents recommendations on how to strengthen Canada’s research system to support innovation, inclusion and competitiveness in Canada. The Federation recommends that the Government of Canada act on the panel’s recommendations. We draw particular attention to the four recommendations described below.

¹ High-demand skills identified in a 2016 survey published by the Business Council of Canada in 2016: [“Developing Canada’s future workforce: A survey of large private-sector employers”](#).

RECOMMENDATION 1

Make long-term investments in the federal granting agencies to reverse declines in Canada's research performance

As identified by the Science Review panel, Canada's research performance has declined relative to peer countries. Canada's spending on R&D as a proportion of GDP has declined over the past 15 years, while this spending is growing among our peer countries. In terms of R&D spending in the higher-education sector as a share of GDP, Canada has fallen from fourth place among OECD nations in 2007 to seventh place in 2014.

The panel also notes that between 2008 and 2015, the Canadian research funding system has shifted to favour priority-driven research (where research topics are selected by non-researcher decision makers) over investigator-led research. The funding available per researcher for priority-driven research increased by 35 percent in this period while funding for investigator-led research declined by three percent. This change risks reducing support for the game-changing, high-impact discoveries that flow from curiosity-driven, investigator-led research.

The panel's report concludes that "these measures point to the need for bold federal leadership and a significant renewal of funding for independent, investigator-led research."²

The Federation supports the Science Review panel's recommendation to put in place a multi-year funding plan that includes a \$485-million increase over the current base over the next four years to support investigator-led research via the granting agencies.

RECOMMENDATION 2

Take steps to improve balance across disciplines in the research funding system

The Science Review panel emphasizes that the humanities and social sciences are integral to the health of the research system but observes that this value has historically been under-recognized: "Although priority-driven research is often focused on driving technological innovation and is therefore more prevalent in the natural and health sciences and engineering, research in the social sciences and humanities holds equal promise to help Canada address many of the challenges the nation faces."³

The report shows that recent changes to Canada's research funding system have adversely affected funding opportunities of scholars in the humanities and social sciences. For example, major research funding programs such as the Canada Excellence Research Chairs program and

² *Investing in Canada's Future: Strengthening the Foundations of Canadian Research*, (2017), page 48.

³ *Investing in Canada's Future: Strengthening the Foundations of Canadian Research*, (2017), page 111.

the Canada First Research Excellence Fund have largely excluded social science and humanities researchers.

Scholars in the humanities and social sciences make up about 50 percent of Canada’s full-time post-secondary faculty, but the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) receives just 15 percent of federal funding to the research granting agencies. SSHRC estimates that it was only able to provide funding support to approximately 25 percent of the research community it serves in 2015-16, suggesting that a significant proportion of Canada’s research community is not able to meet its full research potential.

Considering the crucial contributions made by the humanities and social sciences and the evidence that recent funding changes have disadvantaged this community of researchers, **the Federation recommends that any new funding plan for research include steps to improve the balance within the federal research funding system with particular attention to humanities and social science research. To accomplish this goal, future funding increases for Canada’s research councils should be provided equally across the three granting agencies until a more equitable balance has been achieved.**

RECOMMENDATION 3

Improve support for multidisciplinary and international research

Some of the most pressing issues facing Canadians today – such as climate change, social and economic inequities faced by marginalized groups, food security, immigration and reconciliation with Indigenous peoples – are highly complex, crisscrossing boundaries between countries, levels of government and fields of study. These challenges are characterized by complex historical contexts and resistance to narrow technical solutions.

Addressing such challenges requires multidisciplinary and often international perspectives. Canadian researchers have significant contributions to make to such research partnerships and are sought after, in part, because of their important ongoing research to support a successful multicultural and bilingual society. Unfortunately, as noted in the panel’s report, there are significant gaps in Canada’s funding system that limit its ability to support multidisciplinary and international research. As a result, Canadian researchers are not able to take full advantage of research opportunities in these increasingly vital areas.

The Federation supports the Science Review panel’s recommendations to develop multi-agency strategies to support multidisciplinary and international research collaborations. Dedicated funding should be devoted to support programs in these areas.

RECOMMENDATION 4

Support reconciliation with Indigenous peoples in the post-secondary education sector

As the Truth and Reconciliation Commission has articulated, the post-secondary education sector has a crucial role to play in supporting reconciliation with Indigenous peoples, and – as noted in the Science Review report – “The lead here will be taken overwhelmingly by Indigenous scholars and colleagues in the social sciences and humanities.”⁴

There is an ongoing need to ensure that more Indigenous people have the opportunity to benefit from higher education through continued investments in Indigenous K-12 education and through programs such as the Post-Secondary Student Support Program, which the Government of Canada helped to strengthen through a much-needed reinvestment in Budget 2017. The post-secondary education sector – and humanities and social science departments in particular – are working to support reconciliation by enhancing respect and appreciation for Indigenous histories, cultures, languages, and knowledges. However, such programs require increased support in order to achieve their full potential, particularly through the development of more Indigenous scholars.

The Federation recommends significant funding increases to programs that support access to post-secondary education for Indigenous students, including at the K-12 level; new financial support for Indigenous students at the graduate and post-graduate levels to help develop new Indigenous scholars; and dedicated funding to support programs within the granting councils to ensure long-term success of research by and with Indigenous peoples.

CONCLUSION

A unique opportunity to strengthen Canada’s research system

The Fundamental Science Review is the first comprehensive evidenced-based assessment of Canada’s federally supported research system in more than 40 years. This panel correctly observes that Canada’s fundamental research system plays a crucial role in supporting the prosperity and well-being of Canadians. Their report lays out a comprehensive and feasible set of recommendations to build a truly world-leading research system.

The Federation for the Humanities and Social Sciences encourages the Government of Canada to capture the unique opportunity created by the completion of the Fundamental Science Review by acting on the panel’s recommendations.

⁴ *Investing in Canada’s Future: Strengthening the Foundations of Canadian Research*, (2017), page 20.

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

The Federation:

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

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