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Chair: Mr. Lloyd Longfield





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• (1105)

[English]

**The Chair (Mr. Lloyd Longfield (Guelph, Lib.)):** Welcome to meeting number 48 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 we do have a member attending remotely.

We have one witness here, Dr. Nemer. It's great to have you back at this committee.

Members, please wait for me to recognize you. If you're on Zoom, activate your mike, when you want to speak.

**Mr. Dan Mazier (Dauphin—Swan River—Neepawa, CPC):** Chair, I have a point of clarification.

**The Chair:** No. I'm going to finish reading, and then we'll get into the meeting. I remind members 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.

It's now my pleasure to welcome Dr. Mona Nemer, chief science adviser for Canada. She will have five minutes to get us started.

**Mr. Dan Mazier:** Mr. Chair, I do have a point of clarification.

**The Chair:** Mr. Mazier.

**Mr. Dan Mazier:** Can you please advise this committee when will we return to debating the motion I introduced on Thursday to investigate the infiltration of Canada's research institutions by the communist regime in Beijing?

**The Chair:** That will be up to the committee. The debate was closed at the adjournment of the meeting. It's up to the committee when it wants to start debating that motion again.

Dr. Nemer, are you good to begin?

Mr. Blois.

**Mr. Kody Blois (Kings—Hants, Lib.):** Mr. Chair, I know I'm not a permanent member of this committee, but given the fact that there could be bells, and we do have Dr. Nemer here....We did this at the agriculture committee last night. It worked very well. All parties agreed that as opposed to returning to the House to vote, we would vote virtually in the committee room.

If you give a reasonable time to make that vote happen, it wouldn't displace the testimony of our witness.

**The Chair:** I was going to ask for unanimous consent once we had Dr. Nemer make her presentation, because I want to make sure that we get that on the record. We'll talk about the operation of the committee after that.

Thank you, Mr. Blois, and welcome to our committee.

Dr. Nemer, the floor is yours for five minutes, please.

[Translation]

**Dr. Mona Nemer (Chief Science Advisor, Office of the Chief Science Advisor):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Good morning. Thank you for the opportunity to exchange with the committee on this very important topic.

As a scientist, educator, and former university vice-president of research, I am pleased to share my perspective on our country's scholarships and fellowships system.

[English]

In my career, I have trained more than 100 graduate and post-graduate students, and have mentored and counselled scores more. Today, these individuals work in government, in the biotech and pharma industry, and in our colleges and universities. Many have become leading researchers in key areas from neuroscience to cancer. Some are practising health professionals, while others have become entrepreneurs starting and growing companies. Many were international students, and over 50% of them chose to make Canada their new home upon graduation. As a matter of fact, I too was an international student.

What all my graduate students have in common is fulfilling the requirements of their postgraduate degrees largely through research. This is not specific to my group or to my area of research in biological sciences. What I just described is how graduate programs in science are structured.

In these programs, the bulk of learning happens through hands-on experimenting and problem solving, while carrying out a research project under the supervision of an accredited professor, which is why graduate degrees are in reality apprenticeship programs.

The stipend that graduate students receive, whether a direct scholarship or one paid from the research funds of the supervisor, acknowledges the work they perform while training, just like trade apprentices or medical residents

[*Translation*]

In the past 20 years, the research intensity of our post-secondary institutions has significantly increased, thanks in no small part to federal support for research infrastructure and programs like the Canada research chairs and Canada excellence research chairs. Attracting leading researchers to Canada has, in turn, increased training opportunities, including in key sectors, such as artificial intelligence, data sciences, health and environmental studies, to name just a few. This flourishing research ecosystem has further enhanced Canada's position as a world leader in many advanced technologies with significant economic impacts.

Unfortunately, during this time, the number of scholarships and the value of research grants has not risen as fast as our growing number of graduate students. Consequently, access to scholarships has become limited, and the value of stipends has not kept pace with the cost of living. At a time of workforce shortages and intense international competition, we need to look at ways to better support graduate training opportunities and open them up to all communities in Canada.

[*English*]

There are many reasons why we urgently need to address the issue of graduate and postgraduate training. I will focus on three.

First, graduate programs help people develop their individual talents and skills. Training people through research is one of the best ways to ensure they are job-ready. Beyond the technical expertise gained, doing research helps individuals acquire the transferable competencies most employers are looking for: problem solving, adaptability, resilience and teamwork, to name a few.

Second, a robust graduate training sector contributes to a growing economy. Talent is the magnet that draws industries to a country or region. By helping our universities develop talent, we are making Canada attractive for international investment and spurring regional economic development.

Third, modernizing and diversifying our graduate landscape now will reap enormous benefits for our future. Canada's reputation as a talent powerhouse is attracting the leading industries of tomorrow, from health and food products to electric battery manufacturing and the giants of the auto industry. By enhancing training and postgraduate job opportunities, we will keep talent at home, attract top international students and amplify the virtuous circle that links research, and training through research, to prosperous societies.

In short, now is not the time to rest on our laurels. Just as we couldn't predict, a few years ago, how artificial intelligence or even the pandemic would impact society, we can't always predict what the next big discovery or technical development will be, or what profound changes it will usher in. Making our scholarships more competitive and equally accessible to all will ensure we have the diverse talent pool and workforce needed to take on the as-yet-unknown challenges and opportunities to come. I cannot think of a better way to "future proof" our communities and societies.

• (1110)

[*Translation*]

Thank you.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Thank you, Dr. Nemer, and thank you for all the work you're doing on behalf of science in Canada.

Before we get into the round of questioning, as Mr. Blois pointed out, we are going to have bells at about 20 minutes after 11 o'clock or so, as debate is going on in the House. I wonder whether we can have unanimous consent to go through our speaking list until the vote comes. Then we could do remote voting.

Do we have nods around the room on that?

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

**The Chair:** Wonderful. Thank you. It's great to have your co-operation, committee. That helps me manage the time, as well.

Now we'll go to the first six minutes of questioning.

I have Mr. Lobb up first.

**Mr. Ben Lobb (Huron—Bruce, CPC):** Thanks very much, Mr. Chair.

My first question is in regard to the additional funding.

In fact, all the witnesses who appear say there needs to be more. There's been a different range, I think, per year in the total amount, but it's a significant amount.

If this were to happen, is this something that...? Would it be wise to have a multi-year phase-in? Obviously, these dollars can't all go in at one shot. Is this a multi-year, five-year or 10-year...? What would you recommend?

**Dr. Mona Nemer:** Mr. Chair, this is an excellent question.

Given that graduate programs... A master's degree, for example, lasts two to three years. A Ph.D. is, on average, four. For postdocs, it's usually three, and more in some areas. Having a vision and framework for the medium term, and increasing both the value and the number of scholarships, would certainly be a welcome approach.

I also want to caution you that, while we're talking about scholarships.... I'll make sure everybody appreciates that there are two types: the ones given directly to individuals and the ones paid out of the grad projects, if you want—the researcher fund. If we address one without addressing the other, we cause quite a bit of stress and unbalance in the system. As a matter of fact, it would be highly inequitable, especially for vulnerable groups.

**Mr. Ben Lobb:** Thank you for that.

Do you think it's important that the government of the day identify the priorities based on a number of different factors, in terms of where the bulk of these dollars go? I'll give you two examples. I know the chair represents the University of Guelph. By extension, the University of Guelph.... One could argue there's a tremendous advantage for the government of the day to invest heavily in agricultural research. The other might be, for example, at a university like the one in London, Ontario. Western University does a lot of health research.

Do you think those should be areas of priority, or examples where the government should focus their dollars because it's in the national interest to have a strong health care system, and a very robust agricultural system to feed our people?

• (1115)

**Dr. Mona Nemer:** It's, of course, a very interesting question and one where people often sit on opposite ends of the spectrum. I think we need and can address both, keeping in mind that it takes the number of years that I mentioned to train someone. Agriculture, of course, should be a priority throughout the years, given the reality of Canada's economy, but we can't always predict what it should be, right? I think we need to fund all types of scholarships in all areas. We also need to make sure that we address priority areas, which is why having an overarching science, technology and innovation strategy is useful for the country because it then allows governments to provide additional support in specific areas.

In a nutshell, we can and should be doing both.

**Mr. Ben Lobb:** Great. I just hate to see somebody miss out on funding for an agricultural project or a health research project and the money go instead to studying the lyrics of Dolly Parton songs. That's just one example I bring up. I think I've brought that up a couple of times.

I have one last question for you.

You mentioned that talent brings investment. I agree. I agree to a certain extent, but I want to get your opinion on the recent investments that the government has made in Stellantis and in Volkswagen, which isn't too far from my riding. I know there are a lot of highly skilled people who can do battery research, etc. You have the talent, but if you didn't have the billions of dollars in investment, I don't know that the investment would have been made in St. Thomas or in Windsor.

Do you have any thoughts on that comment that you made?

**Dr. Mona Nemer:** The only thought I would provide is actually about a study that was carried out a few years back now, asking industries what attracts them to a jurisdiction. In the top three, there were the usual suspects of taxation, talent—which was actually

ahead of taxation and subsidies—and then political stability. That's what I read, and that's what I can provide in terms of an answer.

**Mr. Ben Lobb:** Okay.

Is there any more time left, Mr. Chair.

**The Chair:** You have about 10 seconds.

**Mr. Ben Lobb:** Okay, thanks.

**The Chair:** Thank you for the shout-out to the University of Guelph and for balancing that with Western. It was a very good line of questioning.

Thank you for the answers, Dr. Nemer.

Now we'll go over to Mr. Collins from the Liberals for six minutes.

**Mr. Chad Collins (Hamilton East—Stoney Creek, Lib.):** Thanks, Mr. Chairman.

Welcome back to the committee, Dr. Nemer.

Can I ask you...? At the end of your five-minute opening, you talked about scholarships' needing to be more competitive. That's obviously been the common theme through the study so far. There were recommendations in previous studies that the committee has undertaken as it relates to attracting and retaining top talent, and that was one of the recommendations that came through that study.

The term “competitive” is very subjective, right? It means something different to many of the witnesses who have come forward. It's given us an idea of what that funding gap is as it relates to making the environment more competitive to attract and retain top talent.

What's your vision as it relates to funding? What is that magic number as it relates to a dollar amount? Have you given some thought to that as it relates to where it needs to go with investments?

**Dr. Mona Nemer:** I haven't really computed the dollar amounts or anything like that. I think we need to view this in a dynamic context, which is why it was important for me to provide the notion that these are not elite scholarships that we're talking about. These are apprenticeships. These are for people who already have undergraduate degrees, who are in areas that are needed and wanted by the economy. I think there are formulas, and I'll let the department of science compute this.

However, if I may, I'll just tell you what happened yesterday. I was on a panel, speaking with the Canadian Mathematical Society. As all of you appreciate, mathematics is one of the top-five areas from which we need people because we need them everywhere, from modelling the environment to modelling agriculture, to actuary...etc. A first-year Ph.D. student got up and said, "I'm very motivated to do this, but I'm paid less than the minimum wage. I cannot live on this. My parents cannot support me. If I go and work at a bank, I make four times what I'm being paid." It's hard to be motivated to do advanced studies in these circumstances.

I guess this is the kind of criteria and thinking that we need to have here. What is a fair and just stipend for someone who's contributing to advancing knowledge, who's doing full-time research and who's, at the same time, training?

● (1120)

**Mr. Chad Collins:** Thanks for that answer.

My next question would be along the lines of finding other ways and means to support postgraduate students. One of those areas that we've heard about from some of the witnesses is along the lines of housing. As we know, anyone who continues their education, either through research and development or through other connections to a university or college, might find today's housing environment a bit costly compared to where we were maybe 10 years ago.

I was looking to other witnesses to make suggestions as to how the government might assist. In my own municipality, McMaster University just recently constructed and opened a 30-storey, 450-unit postgraduate residence in downtown Hamilton, and I know that many of those units are offered by the university at under-market rate rents.

Can I ask—through you, Mr. Chairman—your thoughts as they relate to finding ways and means, either through other ministries or through other support mechanisms, to help postgraduate students lower the cost of living and help them ease the burden of increased costs that not only students and postgraduate students face today, but that everyone faces today.

**Dr. Mona Nemer:** Mr. Chair, for sure, any help is welcome.

In an ideal world, the institutions would work collaboratively with different levels of government to address the issue. I can tell you, when I was the vice-president of research at the University of Ottawa, the issue of housing was top of mind. The issue of building residences was also problematic.

At the same time, the university couldn't subsidize the housing because of the legislation and policies from the Ontario government. I will just say that it may vary from one province to the other.

It's certainly one area that would help, but we don't want them having a roof—which would already be a good start—but then starving, because as you know and you've probably heard, the number of graduate students going to food banks has skyrocketed in an unbelievable way.

**Mr. Chad Collins:** Dr. Nemer, I think I have just less than a minute left.

In September 2022, the Office of the Chief Science Adviser's youth council released the report "Our Vision for Science". The re-

port found that women, visible minorities, indigenous peoples and persons with disabilities are not being proportionately represented in federal award processes.

How can the Government of Canada better ensure representation of students or researchers from under-represented groups within the graduate and post-doctoral funding system?

**Dr. Mona Nemer:** Thank you very much.

Thank you for referencing this report. It's an outstanding group of young people who did it. I think we need to review our criteria for allocating a lot of the scholarships and research funding. Many of them may favour the establishment and folks who, perhaps, come from certain groups and who are going about advancing their careers in certain ways that others don't have the means and the opportunities to do, so I think this is very important.

**The Chair:** Thank you, both, very much.

● (1125)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Blanchette-Joncas, you have six minutes.

**Mr. Maxime Blanchette-Joncas (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, BQ):** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Good morning, Ms. Nemer. It's a pleasure to see you today.

I listened carefully to your opening statement, and I'd like to know whether you wrote it.

**Dr. Mona Nemer:** Absolutely. There's no doubt that I wrote the speech myself. I don't know whether it's been well received or not, but I did indeed write it.

**Mr. Maxime Blanchette-Joncas:** Okay, Ms. Nemer. I'd like to tell you, with all due respect, that I found it quite weak. You said that scholarships have not kept pace with the cost of living. However, you failed to mention that there's been no increase, not just in the past five years, 10 years or 15 years, but rather in 20 years. That fact didn't seem important enough to mention. You also didn't indicate that Canada is the only G7 country since 2016 to lose researchers.

You're telling us that Canada is a leader in many fields, but you don't indicate that, among the G7 countries, it's the only one to lose researchers. You also didn't tell us that Canada is at a breaking point in the scientific ecosystem, in terms of R and D investments. Canada is the only G7 country to have cut R and D investments over the past 20 years.

With all due respect, Ms. Nemer, I'll say that your speech was more than weak—it lacked courage. If you, Canada's chief science advisor, don't tell us the reality and the truth to influence public policy, who will?

**Dr. Mona Nemer:** Mr. Chair, I think the committee member has misinterpreted my speech.

Indeed, I said that neither scholarships nor the average value of grants had risen over the past several decades. I want to clear up any confusion there may have been.

Furthermore, Canada is not the only country in this situation, but it is unique in terms of the gap between its low investment in research and the average among OECD countries. Obviously, this trend needs to be reversed. I've already expressed that very clearly in public. I'm not hiding any facts from the committee.

**Mr. Maxime Blanchette-Joncas:** Okay.

Ms. Nemer, I'll continue my questions. On a scale of one to 10, how important to you is the indexing of graduate scholarships?

**Dr. Mona Nemer:** It's difficult to talk about indexing scholarships without talking about indexing other things, such as grants. Once indexing applies to one half of the system, it has to apply to the other.

Indexing would be insufficient, in my humble opinion. What we need is an in-depth review of the formula used to calculate the value of research and the value of the work once completed. Then, the entire system needs to be adjusted on that basis. It also needs to be adjusted to reflect how the situation has evolved around the world.

**Mr. Maxime Blanchette-Joncas:** Okay.

Ms. Nemer, perhaps you didn't understand my question. I'll repeat it.

On a scale of one to 10, how important is it to the federal government that its graduate scholarships be increased?

**Dr. Mona Nemer:** Increasing the value of scholarships would be at the very top. However, are we talking about indexing or more than just indexing? That is what I'm trying to explain.

**Mr. Maxime Blanchette-Joncas:** Okay. On a scale of one to 10, what number would you give it?

**Dr. Mona Nemer:** I would say 10.

**Mr. Maxime Blanchette-Joncas:** Excellent.

Could you tell me why, since 2018, graduate scholarships have not been mentioned once in the chief science advisor's annual reports, meaning yours? Your role is to advise the government on public policy, yet you never once highlighted in those reports the importance of increasing graduate scholarships.

Why are you telling me now that this is a top priority when, for five years, you never mentioned it in your annual reports?

**Dr. Mona Nemer:** There is more than one way for me to share my opinions and recommendations with the government. The annual report paints a picture of the situation. In recent years, we were very busy dealing with the pandemic emergency. Many opinions have been shared on that. If memory serves me, in my most recent report, I did indeed recommend increasing support for research to

better prepare for all kinds of emergencies, be it another pandemic or something else. I certainly did not highlight one thing over another.

As I mentioned, I believe that it's essential to remember that 75% of students receive the equivalent of a scholarship through research funding and not directly through scholarships. Fixing this problem for less than 25% of graduate students does not adequately resolve the issue.

• (1130)

[English]

**The Chair:** Thank you.

I'd like to remind Mr. Blanchette-Joncas to address questions through the chair, please, rather than directly to the witness. I think that would help to smooth the conversations as well.

We have Mr. Cannings for six minutes, please.

**Mr. Richard Cannings (South Okanagan—West Kootenay, NDP):** Thank you.

Thank you to Dr. Nemer for being here today. It's always good to have you before this committee.

You emphasized in your opening remarks that there are two or more ways that graduate students receive funding for their work. One is the direct scholarships and fellowships that the tri-councils provide, and the other, the majority, is from the principal investigators themselves or perhaps the department.

To what extent do you think that those scholarships from the tri-councils, which have been stagnant for more than 20 years...? You gave the example of the math student who's living below the poverty line. To what extent do you feel that those values set the standard for the other ways that students are paid?

**Dr. Mona Nemer:** Thank you very much. This is actually a key issue, because of the value of these scholarships.

We have a broad range of these scholarships. We have the Canada graduate scholarships, we have the Banting scholarships, etc. As we look at modernizing our system, we need to review all of this and stop confusing different things.

There is no question that they do set the standard. In many ways, they set the standards for other organizations as well, including not-for-profits, like the Cancer Society, the Heart and Stroke Foundation or the Brain Canada Foundation; for the provincial governments and for the institutions themselves.

It's quite important to bear this in mind.

**Mr. Richard Cannings:** As you know, often investigators in departments top up those amounts to students so they can have a better living.

We had testimony here from Dr. Andrade, from the University of Toronto. She was advising some departments that have been topping up and finding that it's taking more money from their budgets to keep graduate students properly paid to perhaps take on fewer graduate students.

It seems to me that goes directly against what you and I, and everyone here would want to see. We need more graduate students. We need more good research done. This is where this is leaving us.

**Dr. Mona Nemer:** It's absolutely the case.

It would be totally counterproductive, for example, to suggest that we would use existing funds and increase the stipends, because it would have an adverse effect on what we need as a country, which is to have more graduate training, not less.

I heard about the issue yesterday from one of the PIs, the researchers from the Atlantic provinces, where some of the undergraduate institutions that only offer master's degrees have also limited funding and are unable to top up and support students.

The system is not necessarily equitable for all of the different institutions in all of the different parts of the country. Again, those who will suffer the most are the ones who need the most funding, because of where they come from.

• (1135)

**Mr. Richard Cannings:** I have one last question.

Minister Champagne commissioned a report from Dr. Bouchard and the Advisory Panel on the Federal Research Support System. That report recommended that the grants be increased 10% for five years, and 5% thereafter, and that the graduate scholarships also be increased to reflect the changes over the last 20 years.

I'm just wondering whether you support those findings and whether you have advocated for them with the government.

**Dr. Mona Nemer:** Mr. Chair, I absolutely support increasing investments in research and have advocated this from the first day that I walked into this job, and even before. My position on this is very clear.

The Bouchard report has done a great job at providing us with an update on the issues and the challenges we face and the potential solutions. I would like to say that whether we should be adding 10%, or 5%, or 20% is a matter of priorities and calculations.

What I'd like to see us doing is committing to an ambitious target—not even an ambitious target, but a target. For example, we could say that Canada in five years should meet the average of the OECD, or be in the median of the G7 countries in terms of investments in research, and work from there. Reverse-engineer what we need to be doing.

This needs to be dynamic. If we increase by 10%, and others increase by 50% or 20%, then in a few years we're going to be here having exactly the same conversations.

**The Chair:** Thank you for the questions.

I'm looking at the time, and we'll hopefully be able to get through five minutes, five minutes, two and a half minutes and two and a half minutes.

We'll start with Mr. Mazier.

**Mr. Dan Mazier:** Thank you, Chair.

Thank you, Dr. Nemer, for coming here today.

Has the Prime Minister ever discussed increasing student scholarships with you?

**Dr. Mona Nemer:** Mr. Chair, those are the kinds of conversations that I have with the Minister of Science rather than with the Prime Minister. It's the minister's responsibility, I think, to then bring it to his cabinet colleagues and the Prime Minister.

**Mr. Dan Mazier:** Have you ever discussed it with the minister?

**Dr. Mona Nemer:** Yes.

**Mr. Dan Mazier:** Okay, thank you.

Dr. Nemer, we know that the tri-council granting agencies receive significant funding from the federal government. In 2021-22, the Canadian Institutes of Health Research had a budget of \$815.5 million in discretionary funding, which we learned could be reallocated to students on the front lines. Are you aware of any discussions with the tri-council agencies to find savings within their own budgets to reallocate to funding students?

**Dr. Mona Nemer:** Mr. Chair, I'm not aware of these internal conversations among the tri-council. They would have to answer this.

If I may, I would like to specify that the graduate students need to have an environment where they do their research, and they need to have support for that research. If they have the funding, but they don't have the means in terms of the tools and the material required, then they can't carry out their research project. There needs to be a balance in the system in terms of everything that's needed.

**Mr. Dan Mazier:** Thank you.

Dr. Nemer, you spoke about future-proofing in your opening remarks. Are you aware that CSIS warned Canadian research institutions that Beijing is threatening Canada's national security and intellectual property in five sensitive areas of research and development?

**Dr. Mona Nemer:** Yes, I am aware.

**Mr. Dan Mazier:** How seriously should elected officials take this issue of national security in Canadian research institutions?

**Dr. Mona Nemer:** Mr. Chair, the issue about safeguarding research is a very important one, and it has always existed. Spying and stealing intellectual property has always existed.

Other countries have been more interested in us because we've been so successful in so many important areas. I think we need to absolutely look at ways to support our researchers and our institutions to safeguard research, to protect our intellectual property and to make sure we can get the most out of it in our own country.

• (1140)

**Mr. Dan Mazier:** Do you think elected officials could take this a little bit more seriously? Would you like to see more focus on that?

**Dr. Mona Nemer:** It's not my role to tell elected officials what to do.

**Mr. Dan Mazier:** That's okay, we can take it.

Dr. Nemer, from 2017 to 2022, the tri-council of Canadian granting agencies received an increase in funding. The Canadian Institutes of Health Research funding went from \$1.1 billion to \$1.4 billion. The National Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada funding went from \$1.2 billion to \$1.4 billion, and the Social Sciences of Humanities Research Council of Canada funding went from \$784 million to \$1 billion.

Despite all of this new spending, our committee has heard stories of students who have turned to food banks, who find themselves homeless, living in shelters as the cost of rent across this country has skyrocketed. We had students on strike here on Parliament Hill. They filled our committee room, which is good. I commend them for coming out and speaking up to let their voices be heard at this committee.

Why do you think this government is ignoring the voices of students?

**Dr. Mona Nemer:** Mr. Chair, first of all, I am very supportive of this committee's study, which is extremely timely and important for the country.

As I said, I can't speak for the government. The only thing I can say is that if it were an easy approach.... If we had only the scholarships that are paid directly to students, and we could deal with them, it would be one thing. I think it's the system that needs to be examined properly. There needs to be proper coordination and analysis to see whether there are efficiencies that can be gained. These multiple layers of scholarship programs, and so on.... I think it's the appropriate thing to do, to examine all this now.

**Mr. Dan Mazier:** Is that good, Chair?

**The Chair:** Yes, that's great. Thank you.

I see the analysts typing away. I'm looking forward to seeing the testimony coming back to us. This is a terrific discussion.

Ms. Bradford, perhaps you'd like to continue the discussion for the next five minutes.

**Ms. Valerie Bradford (Kitchener South—Hespeler, Lib.):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, Dr. Nemer, for coming back to our committee again today.

With respect to the equity, diversity and inclusion requirements and practices for Canada research chairs, how is the federal govern-

ment supporting diversity and inclusion in the funding space, and what can we be doing better?

**Dr. Mona Nemer:** The issue of EDI is extremely important, and the federal government has taken some pretty significant steps in requiring institutions to reach the pre-established and agreed upon targets, so I think that has been an important development.

I think in terms of supporting EDI at the level of the chairs program, that's the end of the pipeline; that's the ultimate goal. We need to see whether earlier in the pipeline we are supporting EDI, whether during our undergraduate programs or our graduate programs, including scholarships. I think we need to have a holistic view of this. There are also areas that are more in need of attention than others are, so we also need to focus our efforts.

**Ms. Valerie Bradford:** Following on that, how does the government ensure equal opportunities for both male and female applicants in its scholarship and post-doctoral fellowship programs?

**Dr. Mona Nemer:** You know, I remember a long time ago when I wrote my application for the chair program, one needed basically to brag about their accomplishments, and bragging, with all due respect, does not come naturally to many women and many females. So sometimes just the way the applications are set up can have an undesirable effect in terms of the review of the applications and the material that is in front of the peer review committees for this. I think the gender lens needs to be taken into account throughout the process.

• (1145)

**Ms. Valerie Bradford:** Thank you for that.

Can you provide the committee with some insight into the role of the Canada Research Coordinating Committee in addressing systemic barriers in research faced by women and other marginalized groups?

**Dr. Mona Nemer:** You want me to comment on the CRCC efforts? I'm sorry but I didn't hear the beginning.

**Ms. Valerie Bradford:** Yes, it's on the Canada Research Coordinating Committee.

**Dr. Mona Nemer:** The Canada Research Coordinating Committee undertook basically to look at horizontal issues, and systemic discrimination and exclusion of certain communities was high on the list. The first thing was to get the data, because we didn't collect data systematically before, and to address it through the different programs, so it is a work in progress. I think the tri-agency presidents would probably be in a better position than I am to give you an update on this.

**Ms. Valerie Bradford:** Understood.

Mentorship and networking are so important in progressing through any career or any program. Are there any mentorship or networking opportunities provided to female scholars and post-doctoral fellows to enhance their professional growth and increase their chances of career success?

**Dr. Mona Nemer:** Mr. Chair, mentorship is an issue that is very close to my heart. It's one that is extremely important. Mentorship and role models matter. In our system, we actually don't value this. We don't have prizes for mentorship, and in our institutions, we don't systematically take into account the different implications for many of our researchers. I think this is an area that would certainly benefit from the review you're undertaking.

**Ms. Valerie Bradford:** How does the Canadian government collaborate with the academic institutions and other stakeholders to ensure a holistic approach in promoting equity of access to financial resources across genders within scholarship and post-doctoral fellowship programs?

**Dr. Mona Nemer:** Mr. Chair, this is a difficult question for me to answer. I left the university five years ago as VP of research, but I know that at the time there were programs, including for infrastructure, for which institutions had to make a commitment regarding diversity and a number of other criteria, so I believe it's through the different programs.

**Ms. Valerie Bradford:** Thank you.

**The Chair:** Great. Thank you very much.

We'll now go to Mr. Blanchette-Joncas for two and a half minutes, please.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Maxime Blanchette-Joncas:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I want to talk more about equity, diversity and inclusion.

A Radio-Canada report on May 3 indicated that 95% of funding from the three granting councils had been awarded to scientific research projects for which the applications had been written in English. I'd like the chief science advisor to give us her opinion on that.

Did the three granting agencies apply the principles of equity, diversity and inclusion?

Does the chief science advisor recognize the importance of writing funding applications in French and having scientific publications in French?

How does she explain the fact that 95% of the \$8 billion in research funding awarded between 2019 and 2022 went to applications written solely in English? I'd like the chief science advisor to share her opinion on that.

**Dr. Mona Nemer:** Mr. Chair, that's a fundamental issue.

Canada is a bilingual country. There are two official languages. People, including scientists, should be able to express themselves and work in the official language of their choice. It is extremely important for the granting agencies to adopt measures to process applications in either of those two languages. I believe that this is the case, but that would be a question for those agencies to answer.

Since I've spent the vast majority of my career in Quebec, I have an idea of how things work. Often, my francophone colleagues in Quebec prefer to write their funding applications in English, because they say that it increases the pool of peers able to review the application. It's a personal choice, then.

That said, I believe that it's important to ensure that the system can process applications in either official language.

• (1150)

**Mr. Maxime Blanchette-Joncas:** Thank you very much, Ms. Nemer.

[*English*]

**The Chair:** Thank you. That's two and a half minutes.

We look forward to getting that report that Mr. Blanchette-Joncas is referring to tabled. That's our next hour in camera.

We go over to you, Mr. Cannings.

**Mr. Richard Cannings:** Thank you.

It's been a bit of a mystery to me as to where and at what level these decisions to set the amounts for scholarships are made.

Are they set at the tri-council level? Do they get a funding envelope from the government and part of that is to go to the scholarships and fellowships? Do they set the amounts of scholarships and decide that they should keep it low and give it to more students?

We've had some testimony to that effect. I'm just wondering if, in your career at those levels, you know where those decisions are made.

**Dr. Mona Nemer:** Mr. Chair, the only programs that I remember where the government had set the amount and the number of scholarships and fellowships specifically were the Vanier and the Banting programs. For the others, I wasn't there. I don't remember.

As you know, the granting council is given an envelope for certain things and then they have to do a Treasury Board submission. This is where things get worked out. That's all I can say.

**Mr. Richard Cannings:** I've kind of been to coming to an understanding of that.

If that funding envelope is such that now.... For the past 20 years, it seems those decisions have been made to keep the levels of the scholarships the same as they were 20 years ago in order to help more students get funding, yet in an ironic way, we're not supporting them because we're paying them poverty wages.

Again, I just want you to comment on whether it's time that we should change that paradigm and say that we have to pay these students a living wage or we're going to lose them.

**Dr. Mona Nemer:** Yes, Mr. Chair, it's exactly that. If the pie is the same, then how do you divide it up?

[*Translation*]

Tough choices have to be made.

[English]

I think it's counterproductive to underpay the trainees when we need them. If they have to work outside of their studies, it is very clear that it delays their graduation. That's also counterproductive. As a country and a society, our investments are best used to pay them properly and have them finish their training as soon as possible and be a valuable part of society.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

Thank you for your testimony as well as your answers, which are going to be very helpful for our study.

We do have to get to votes now.

Before we suspend, I have a reminder for Mr. Lobb.

If you can come back into the meeting through the in camera link, we can then start discussing the "Research and Scientific Publication in French" report. Hopefully, we'll get that to a point where Dr. Nemer can see that valuable work by this committee as well.

We will suspend until that votes are over in at least the next 10 minutes or so.

[*Proceedings continue in camera*]

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