

Tri-Council Harmonization of the Canada Graduate Scholarships: A Discussion Guide

Introduction

Canada and most other developed countries are reflecting on the changing nature of graduate studies and postdoctoral research, spearheaded principally by the changing needs of the labour market, the challenges of a digital economy, new trends in research (including the convergence of disciplines with different training traditions) and the international pressures to innovate. The federal granting agencies (CIHR, NSERC, SSHRC) have also been rethinking their role in this change paradigm, and have pursued important reform to their respective program architectures in an effort to adapt to this new conjecture and to ensure they reflect the changing nature of graduate studies in Canada and better support the potential of the new generation of Canadian leaders.

The Tri-Council Harmonization Project was established to provide an opportunity to critically examine the program architecture and the delivery mechanisms of the Canada Graduate Scholarships (CGS) Master's and Doctoral programs. It aims at creating a harmonized, more flexible and effective system of application and assessment to support the most promising students and to eliminate silos that exist in key areas.

The issues presented for consultation have been developed based on analysis of national and international trends in graduate studies and skills development, as well as initial discussions with key stakeholders. The current consultations with students, postsecondary institution representatives and other stakeholders will refine a set of recommendations to be submitted to the federal granting agencies governing councils in spring 2013.

Key Features of the current CGS program

In the past few years, the funding landscape for the training of Highly Qualified Personnel (HQP) in Canada has been transformed, due, in very large part, to considerable investments on the part of the federal government. In 2003, the Government of Canada announced the creation of a new tri-agency *Canada Graduate Scholarship* (CGS) program, which enabled the agencies to currently offer in total, each year, 2,500 CGS Master's Scholarships and 2,500 Doctoral Scholarships, in addition to regular Master's and Doctoral scholarships offered by each of the agencies. In 2008, the federal government introduced the highly prestigious Vanier CGS Doctoral as well as the CGS Michael Smith Foreign Study Supplement programs. In Budget 2009, temporary funding was provided for additional awards through the CGS program, and in Budget 2010 the Government announced the creation of the Banting postdoctoral fellowship program.

In addition to tri-council funding opportunities, agencies provide support for training by allocating sums to their respective training portfolio. Examples include the SSHRC Doctoral Fellowships opportunity and the NSERC Postgraduate Scholarships -Doctoral opportunity which offer awards to Canadian students studying in Canada or abroad. CIHR also has a number of awards dedicated to students pursuing studies abroad. To that list, must also be added the different supplements, such as the Michael-Smith Foreign Study Supplement and /or awards that target specific areas of interest, such as the CIHR Priority Announcements/ and or prizes.

The direct form of support to graduate training (through scholarships and fellowships) is complemented by an important indirect investment in training through grants to researchers. These often take the form of stipends accorded to students working on similar research topics as their supervisors or in labs and affiliated hospitals. These stipends are often more flexible in nature, allowing for example, the opportunity for researchers to recruit international students on their teams or to give additional

opportunities to students to gain valuable research training. Recently, agencies have also implemented a variety of programs offering training program grants (NSERC's CREATE CIHR's STIHR and SSHRC's Talent Partnerships) that have similarities to some international models like the US IGERT model or NIH's Training Grants.

The final key characteristic of the current CGS support is the co-delivery of funding opportunities with the faculties and departments of graduate studies at Canadian universities. Universities play a central role not only in managing funds for awardees, but also in the process of application and - for some funding opportunities - initial screening and adjudication. In considering the future of the tri-council funding opportunities, the agencies will continue to strive to improve service standards, create efficiencies in the co-delivery of programs, and assess and refine business practices in light of changing technology.

The harmonization exercise will provide an opportunity to ensure greater coherence and alignment across agencies funding opportunities, by examining the specific objectives, eligibility conditions and award levels associated with particular funding opportunities.

Moving Forward

In going forward, the CGS harmonization exercise offers the opportunity to provide a more flexible model that is in line with the changing nature of graduate studies in Canada, including models of excellence and financial support, and to move to a business model where the partnership with institutions is strengthened. It also provides the opportunity for both the institutions and the tri-council agencies to implement new models of program delivery which are integrating efficiencies and the efficient use of resources.

Underlying Principles

The Tri-Council Harmonization Project provides an opportunity to critically examine the ways in which the three federal granting agencies are delivering the CGS Program and to re-think some of the fundamentals. Specifically, the changes envisaged will rely on, and be guided by, five core principles: *Integration, Simplicity, Quality of Service, Excellence, and Accountability.*

- **Integration:** a newly designed and integrated CGS delivery mechanism across the three federal granting agencies, a "single window" application portal, *a single brand for the program.*
- **Simplicity:** eliminate duplication, simplify the application and selection processes, adopt consistent, harmonized policies, rules and regulations across the three federal granting agencies.
- **Quality of Service:** process applications and announce results in a timely fashion, provide up-to-date program information, create tools and resources for both applicants and institutions, and introduce innovative communication and information technologies as part of the program delivery mechanism.
- **Excellence:** support excellence and innovation, support disciplinary/multi-disciplinary/interdisciplinary approaches to training, and develop common selection criteria that promote excellence.
- **Accountability:** ensure appropriate accountability, improve monitoring and achievement reporting.

Re-Thinking the Business Model

The three federal granting agencies propose to **fully harmonize** the delivery model for the Canada Graduate Scholarships-Master's and Doctoral support programs and to **devolve the administration** for the Canada Graduate Scholarships-Master's program entirely to the Universities. .

The agencies vision of a renewed CGS program involves maintaining key features of the current program, while introducing some new elements:

1. **Enhancing co-delivery of the CGS program with Canadian institutions:** The agencies co-deliver many of their scholarships and fellowships funding opportunities in partnership with Canadian universities. The agencies propose that ALL current Masters and Doctoral programs offered by the three granting agencies move to the co-delivery approach. Co-delivery implies a need for the development of centralized awards administration models within institutions, models that would extend to the administration of Masters and Doctoral Awards for all affiliated hospitals, research centres and other organizations currently administering tri-council awards.
2. **Harmonizing Delivery Mechanisms, Policies, and Tools:** The range of modifications and improvements would include such changes as:
 - A single tri-council application portal; harmonized Master's and Doctoral application forms; a common set of policies, rules and regulations governing programs (including Post-award rules and regulations); common Roles and Responsibilities guidelines; common reporting requirements;
 - Integration of the Michael Smith Foreign Study Supplements into the CGS application process and full devolution of the program delivery to the institutions;
 - Adoption of clear research training objectives that drive the assessment of graduate student training across the disciplines and throughout graduate studies. Defining training would bring much needed consistency and coherence across the programs. The proposed objectives include:
 - the development of research, professional skills (diverse skills mix) and interpersonal characteristics and abilities (such as civic engagement, sports, etc...);
 - the demonstrated potential for innovation and contribution to knowledge of the discipline or area of research;
 - encourage a global outlook among students through international study opportunities, as well as other forms of connections, collaborations, networks, internships and exposure to global issues;
 - the importance of meaningful mentoring and institutional support as a key contributor to successful degree completion.
3. **Devolving the CGS Master's program to the institutions:** The agencies are proposing to devolve the selection process and awards at the Master's level to the institutions. This approach will simplify the application process, eliminate the need for agency-specific review panels, and consolidate recruitment and award decisions at the level of post-secondary institutions. The allocation of awards could take the form of grants to institutions. This change implies that:
 - the agencies will no longer conduct national peer reviewed competitions of the CGS Master's applications;

- in this model, applications for CGS support will be submitted by students through a tri-council portal and harmonized application form to the University of their choice, which will conduct the selection process;
 - students will apply via institutions where they are registered or intend to register (incoming model) -not through institutions where they are completing their studies (outgoing model);
 - The CGS Master's award will no longer be portable;
 - the universities will receive **an allocation of awards** they can offer to students based on merit reviews at the institutional level.
4. **Fully Harmonizing the CGS Doctoral program:** While the harmonization of the CGS Doctoral program implies important changes, most current program features will remain:
- the agencies will continue to hold national competitions and conduct peer reviewed adjudications based on current committee structures;
 - the agencies will introduce a common tri-council review mechanisms to ensure consistency in excellence standards, for disciplinary, multi-disciplinary, and interdisciplinary research is supported, eliminating ineligibility of applications related to subject matter;
 - the agencies will commit that every application submitted to the CGS-Doctoral program will find a home at one of the agencies;
 - the agencies will adopt a formula for calculating application quotas to institutions based on indicators of excellence in research;
 - the harmonized CGS-Doctoral model proposes to enhance the co-management delivery with the institutions by adopting the co-management model by all agencies.

Proposed Timeline for Implementation

2013/14	2014-15
Design Harmonized CGS Program Simplify application process through implementation of a tri-agency, single-window application portal Implement changes to the CGS Master's program	Implement changes to the CGS Doctoral program

Benefits of the CGS Harmonization

A harmonized CGS program across the agencies will allow graduate students and post secondary institutions to take full advantage of simpler application and adjudication procedures and processes; greater alignment across the agencies of key characteristics of funding opportunities, such as eligibility, selection criteria and post-award rules and regulations.

The harmonized program will provide the partnering Canadian postsecondary institutions and the agencies with new opportunities for administrative streamlining, cost savings, and greater flexibility, and enhanced reporting and monitoring capabilities, while focusing on supporting excellence

Thank you for your time and consideration in responding to the following questions. Your input is valuable to us. You may send your comments to **our email address**.

Key Issues—Send Us Your Feedback

The agencies are seeking your feedback on the following key issues related to the Harmonization of the CGS program.

Note that the feedback received will not be attributed to any individuals specifically, unless permission has been obtained beforehand.

Email your feedback to:

You may also submit your feedback online by visiting the CGS Harmonization Web page at

Deadline for feedback: April x, 2013

Instructions

Please review the and respond to questions 1 through 6.

To help us analyze and report meaningfully on the feedback gathered, we ask that you indicate your role (e.g., student, faculty member) and province or territory of residence.

Your role:

- Student or postdoctoral researcher
- Faculty member at Canadian postsecondary institution
- Administrator at Canadian postsecondary institution
- Other (please specify):

Your province/territory of residence:

Question 1

The agencies are proposing several enhancements to the co-delivery model with Canadian institutions. Are there additional changes that might be considered?

Question 2

A diverse set of research and research-related skills and abilities, international mobility and connectedness, as well as meaningful mentoring and institutional support are key contributors to success in the completion of advanced studies and in gaining access to the labour market. What measures might the agencies consider to better promote these elements of training?

Question 3

Are there other elements that should be considered in defining effective research training?

Question 4

What principles and criteria should be used to determine the formulae for calculating allocations and quotas?

Question 5

How can the prestige of the CGS Master's Award be maintained in a model where the delivery of the program has been devolved to the institutions?

Question 6

Are there other issues that the agencies should consider in their efforts to harmonize the CGS program?

Thank you in advance for your time and consideration in contributing to this consultation. We value your input.

Next Steps

The following steps are planned for the spring of 2013:

1. submit to tri-council governing bodies for consideration a set of recommendations based on information gathered during the consultation;
2. share with interested parties a summary of the feedback and decisions taken; and
3. launch the new, redesigned CGS program.