

CCUBC	Canadian Council of University Biology Chairs
CUDBC	Conseil Universitaire des Directeurs de Biologie du Canada

January 31, 2012

The Honourable Christian Paradis
Minister of Industry & Minister of State (Agriculture)
C.D. Howe Building
235 Queen Street
Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0H5

Dear Minister Paradis,

We are writing to express our concerns regarding the impact of recent policy changes at the Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada (NSERC) on the balance between funding directed towards basic, discovery-driven science research versus research directed by industry needs, within Canadian Universities. While we acknowledge that the Government of Canada has set as a priority the transfer of knowledge from basic research into practical applications of value to Canadians, we contend that the resource re-allocations at NSERC run counter to this. Specifically, we wish to point to the precipitous drop in post-graduate scholarships and postdoctoral fellowships awarded in 2011, relative to previous years, and draw your attention to the impact that this has on our ability as University-based, NSERC-Discovery Grant-funded researchers to train the next generation of scientists (who will ultimately contribute to the growth of the future, knowledge-based economy of Canada).

The NSERC Discovery Grant programme is the core resource for basic (non-medical) science research at Canadian Universities. Indeed, the International External Review of NSERC's Discovery Grant system reported that this programme has three strengths: it funds programmes not projects, allowing Canadian scientists to be responsive to unexpected opportunities and encouraging creative and cutting-edge approaches; it provides stable base funding, which is often leveraged by researchers; and it has supported Canadian researchers to compete at the highest international levels with some of the lowest natural sciences and engineering funding per capita in the developed world. The success of this programme in generating transformative research is evident from the numerous success stories posted on the NSERC website (http://www.nserc-crsng.gc.ca/Media-Media/ImpactStories-ArticlesPercutants_eng.asp).

However, the NSERC Discovery Grant programme is intimately coupled with open competitions for Post-Graduate Scholarship and Postdoctoral Fellowship programmes. The diversion of existing funds away from scholarships & fellowships programmes into more specialized programmes, such as CREATE, is counter-productive and threatens to weaken research excellence and innovation. That is, whereas both programmes support student and postdoctoral stipends, the allocation of funds to programmes such as CREATE puts the funds into the hands of a small number of researchers. This makes more difficult the role of University researchers in the training of young scientists, which is one of the main "products" of University-based, NSERC-Discovery Grant-funded research in Canada.

As Chairs of Biology Departments at Canadian Universities, we urge you to consider the role of Canadian University-based research when setting funding priorities, and especially the consequent impact of resource reallocation within agencies such as NSERC as they strive to meet the Government's objectives. We have a vibrant, world-class science training system in Canada; however, changes in core research funding programmes inevitably erodes our ability to compete on the world stage, and compromises the excellence of the trainees we can produce. This contravenes your Government's stated objectives of increasing the impact of the research enterprise in Canada.

Sincerely



Dr. Hugh Broders, President
Canadian Council of University Biology Chairs (CCUBC)

Cc: Dr. S. Fortier, President, NSERC

Letter endorsed by the following Heads of Biology/Biological Sciences Departments at Canadian Universities:

Judy Anderson	University of Manitoba	David Law	Lakehead University
Mark Bernards	Western University	Lucy Lee	Wilfrid Laurier Univ.
Soren Bondrup-Nielsen	Acadia University	Kathy Lewis	Univ. Northern BC
Joyce Boon	UBC, Okanagan Campus	Paul Marino	Memorial University
Felix Breden	Simon Fraser University	William Marshall	St Francis Xavier
Mark Brigham	University of Regina	Brian McCarry	McMaster University
Hugh Broders	Saint Mary's University	Bill Milsom	UBC (Zoology)
Doug Bruce	Brock University	Susan Morante	Mount Royal University
Ed Byard	Winnipeg	Jacques Nuckle	University of Moncton
Michael Caldwell	University of Alberta	Cindy Paszkowski	University of Alberta
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Jack Gray	University of Saskatchewan	David Rose	University of Waterloo
Lawrence Hale	UPEI	Locke Rowe	U of T (Ecology and Evolutionary Biology)
James Hare	University of Manitoba	Anthony Russell	University of Calgary
Steve Heard	UNB (Fredericton)	Peter Ryser	Laurentian
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