



SCIENCE & POLICY EXCHANGE

DIALOGUE SCIENCES & POLITIQUES

Survey unveils equity issues faced by graduate and postgraduate students and their opinion on the current state of the federal funding system

Montreal, October 20th, 2020 - As Canada continues to manage the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, supporting Canadian science and research is key to rebuilding a healthy and more prosperous country. Students and early career researchers, a group often overlooked, are a critical part of the research and innovation ecosystem, and their work is vital to sustain the research community.

At [Science & Policy Exchange](#) (SPE), a student-run non-profit organization, we noticed that the views of trainees were under-represented in talks of science funding and thus sought to hear directly from current and recent graduate students and postdoctoral fellows about their views on trainee awards.

In October 2018, SPE launched a bilingual nation-wide survey that took into account three federal council agencies: ([CIHR](#) (Canadian Institute of Health Research), [NSERC](#) (Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council), and [SSHRC](#) (Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council). This survey allowed us to collect over 1100 responses from October 9th, 2018 to January 15th, 2019. Based on the collected data, our analysis unveils the following issues encountered by graduates and postgraduates students:

- **A monopoly of trainee funding supports**

The eligibility, criteria and availability of the funding offered by federal agencies lead to inaccessibility if a relatively small number of trainees with demonstrated “excellence” can monopolize a series of awards, leaving the majority unsupported.

- **Needs to increase award values and number**

Graduate students and postdoctoral fellows in all disciplines suggested increasing awards to follow inflation and the recommendations from the [Fundamental Science Review](#).

- **Under-representation across fields of study**

Trainees from the humanities, social sciences, and interdisciplinary studies shared that their research was not adequately represented by current federal funding opportunities compared to those in health and physical sciences.

- **Differences in experience between people with different gender identities**

Men have been historically overrepresented in the sciences, and still remain so in many disciplines. People of other genders may face unique barriers to participation in research such as those associated with care-giving or child-bearing.

- **Under-representation of Indigenous groups**

Indigenous award holders were 40% more likely to require other sources of funding in addition to their federal awards, compared to non-Indigenous respondents.

- **International students face specific challenges**

International mobility facilitates collaborative exchange, which strengthens both global science and global partnerships. However, international graduate students are ineligible for the majority of Canadian federal training awards.

The SPE survey of 1100 respondents highlights graduate and postgraduate students' challenges on Canadian scholarships and fellowships. See our [executive micro-report](#) for more analytical synopses.

The COVID-19 pandemic has amplified the necessity to invest in research trainees to ensure the sustainability of Canada's research sector. This moment provides an opportunity for funding agencies to revamp their granting processes in order to ensure the equitable and inclusive recruitment, development and retention of a diverse pool of world-class researchers.

About Science & Policy Exchange

Science & Policy Exchange is a non-profit advocacy group run by graduate students and post-doctoral fellows in Montreal, whose aims are twofold: (1) to foster the student voice in evidence-based decision making and (2) to bring together leading experts from academia, industry, and government to engage and inform students and the public on issues at the interface of science and policy.

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