



Federal Budget misses opportunity to make significant positive impact in post-graduate research

Harper Government fails to keep “top-minds” in Canada

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Ottawa, March 8, 2010 – The 2010 Federal Budget recognizes the importance of post-graduate research, but fails to make a tangible financial contribution to the national research agenda to enable Canada to attract and retain more highly qualified researchers.

“We are disappointed that this budget offers no relief to the significant compensation inequity that we are experiencing across the country,” says Marianne Stanford, Chair of the Canadian Association of Postdoctoral Scholars. “It is critical that our government provides real leadership to attract and retain the best and the brightest in Canada and internationally.”

The Federal government attempted to address this issue in 2006 by allowing scholarships and fellowships to be administered tax free under an Educational Tax Credit. Since that time, the taxation of postdoctoral fellowships has been inconsistent across the country. The 2010 Budget proposes to remove postdoctoral scholars (PDFs) from those who can benefit from the Educational Tax Credit, resulting in an immediate and steep pay cut for a significant number of PDFs in Canada. It also creates a two-tiered system where graduate students, studying to completing Masters and Doctoral degrees receive tax free scholarships that offer higher compensation than their postdoctoral colleagues after taxation. This will result in more senior researchers with multiple extra years of experience and expertise making less than or equal to their junior colleagues. This will create a significant financial disincentive to high quality postdoctoral research in Canada.

The 2010 Federal Budget partially addresses postdoctoral compensation by introducing “\$45 million over five years to the granting councils to establish a new and prestigious post-doctoral fellowship program to attract top-level talent to Canada”. Although more fellowships for PDFs is a significant investment in Canadian research, these fellowships only address PDFs coming to Canada and not the increasing number of PhDs graduating from Canadian academic institutions. Furthermore, they will only benefit a select few PDFs when universities across the country rely on teams of PDFs for their research to succeed.

According to 2009 survey data, 67% of current PDFs in this country are Canadian (or permanent residents), and academia in Canada is putting significant resources into increasing graduate enrollment. In the coming years, many more graduating PhDs in Canada will choose to continue their research in this country and we should do everything possible to retain this top talent as well as recruit top talent from other countries. A failure to do so will result in a significant ‘brain drain’ of our best and brightest to other countries, and impact the excellent top quality research undertaken in Canadian institutions. Already, PDFs are electing to travel to the United Kingdom, United States, Germany, and Australia where compensation is substantially greater.

Post-doctoral research is a compulsory step for the large majority of doctoral graduates who plan to enter academia, and this period can last up to six years post graduation, particularly in the medical sciences. Most PDFs undertake this research receiving modest fellowships (\$35,000-40,000 per year) that do not provide adequate compensation considering that these researchers hold the highest degree that an academic institution can confer. They are typically 30-35 years old, often with partners and children, and high accompanying student debt.



For further information

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