



February 13, 2017

Dr. Mario Pinto
President
Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council (NSERC)
50 Albert Street
Ottawa ON K1A 1H5

Dear Dr. Pinto,

Greetings from the Canadian Psychological Association! Students represent the next generation of researchers, who as highly trained and skilled workers, will contribute to Canada's science culture by making ground-breaking discoveries and tackling the many economic, social, and cultural challenges facing Canadians. We are writing to express our concern about two practices that NSERC has in place that are having significant negative impacts on Canadian students. These practices are specific to the duration of funding for master's students and the number of times an individual can apply for a post-doctoral fellowship.

In recent years, NSERC reduced its funding for master's students from two years to one year. This decision has significant effects on the ability of small universities that only offer a terminal master's program (i.e., no doctoral program) to recruit and retain students. Further, master's degrees, whether in psychology or not, are rarely completed in one year. This funding strategy is out of step with program demands; reinstating the two-year funding model would easily solve this problem.

NSERC also reduced the number of times an individual can apply for a post-doctoral fellowship from two to one. The CPA was told that three factors contributed to the decision to reduce the number of permitted applications:

1. *the requirement to save money in times of reduced funding received from the government.* This speaks to the need for more funding for the granting councils to support graduate students.
2. *a reduced burden on committee reviewers. This speaks to the need for granting agencies to obtain more reviewers, and/or develop a less burdensome review process for reviewers.* Our members and Canadian researchers in general are willing to participate in these committee; although we acknowledge the extra work for program officers and NSERC staff, the costs are outweighed by the benefits for the applicants.
3. *a success rate that was not higher on second application attempt than first attempt.* This factor is flawed as a decision-making criterion. By reducing the PDF application attempt to only once, the process becomes higher risk for the applicant. As a result, very good graduate students take a year between the end of the PhD (or extend the PhD by a year), and thus incur more student debt and delay their careers and lives, to devote to building their CV for the PDF application, for which there is no guarantee of success. For some individuals, their PhD may be their best work in which case they need a year to publish their results, while for others, their PhD work may be the stepping stone to their next best work; allowing for two application attempts covers

both scenarios. In still other cases, individuals are in fact more successful on their second attempt; either because they improved their application based on feedback from the first attempt, they were being evaluated by a different review committee, and/or their pool of competition was not as strong compared to the pool in their first attempt.

The CPA appreciates that the funding councils have had to seek ways to find savings under the previous government of Canada's efforts to return to balanced budgets; however, the current Government and Canadian stakeholders are committed to a thriving and successful economy and society – supporting our students through scholarships and fellowships are central to achieving these objectives. Changing the master's and post-doctoral fellowship funding envelopes in the way they have been compromises and undermines one of the fundamental aims of NSERC which is "to make Canada a country of discoverers and innovators for the benefit of all Canadians". Thus, we urge NSERC to reinstate the two-year funding model for master's funding and reinstate the two-application attempt model for Post-Doctoral Fellowships.

The CPA appreciates the work and commitment that NSERC undertakes on behalf of basic research in Canada. We share your commitment to supporting researchers and their contributions to a thriving society. Funding for students is critical to this support.

Sincerely,



Jean Saint-Aubin, Ph.D.
Chair, Scientific Affairs Committee
Canadian Psychological Association



Lisa Votta-Bleeker, Ph.D.
Deputy CEO and Science Director
Canadian Psychological Association