

Minister of Science



Ministre des Sciences

Ottawa, Canada K1A 0H5

MAR 09 2017

Mr. Craig Berggold, MA
President
Public Service Alliance of Canada
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Silja Freitag, PhD
Vice President, Postdoctoral Scholars
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Dear Mr. Berggold and Dr. Freitag:

Thank you for your letter, which was transmitted to me by Mr. Mark Gerretsen, your Member of Parliament, regarding your concerns about the challenges faced by postdoctoral scholars in Canada. I note that you also wrote to my colleague, the Honourable Navdeep Bains, Minister of Innovation, Science and Economic Development, on this matter.

It was a pleasure to meet you in January during my visit to Queen's University. Our government values the contributions of our postdoctoral scholars, who help position Canada as an international leader in science research and development. This is demonstrated by significant federal investments through the three federal granting councils in programs such as the Banting Postdoctoral Fellowships, as well as via individual granting council fellowships.

We are aware that there are a number of concerns facing our postdoctoral scholars, and the federal granting councils are addressing several of the issues that fall under their purview. For example, more flexible arrangements have been implemented to allow postdoctoral scholars to interrupt their awards for (unpaid) parental, medical, or family-related leave for up to three years, and each council provides access to paid parental leave for up to six months.

For career development, the granting councils are funding a study by the Canadian Association for Graduate Studies, which is expected to lead to the development of a national inventory of professional development programs to help expand opportunities for postdoctoral scholars. Furthermore, Mitacs, an organization that receives federal funding through my department to deliver research and training programs, offers postdoctoral scholars internship opportunities in industry through its Elevate program.

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Some of the issues raised in your letter—such as changing the employment status of postdoctoral scholars to allow for benefits like Employment Insurance and the Canada Pension Plan, as well as salaries provided by institutions—are not within the direct purview of the granting councils.

As you know, I launched the independent review of federal support for fundamental science last summer in order to ensure that federal support in this area is strategic, effective, and helps preserve Canada's world-class standing. As part of its mandate, the expert advisory panel conducting the review has explored the barriers students, trainees, and emerging researchers face in the current Canadian system. I look forward to receiving the panel's forthcoming final report.

I expect that this review will give us valuable advice on how to strengthen Canada's international standing in fundamental science and ensure that our scientists, including early career researchers like the postdoctoral scholars you represent, have the tools, training, and support needed to excel. As Minister of Science, I am working to strengthen the Canadian science ecosystem, and I value the views and contributions of postdoctoral scholars to this effect. I am confident that the panel's advice will represent a step in the right direction toward identifying how we can better support our early career researchers.

Once again, thank you for writing and please accept my best wishes.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'K. Duncan', written in a cursive style.

The Honourable Kirsty Duncan, P.C., M.P.

c.c.: The Honourable Navdeep Bains, P.C., M.P.
Mr. Mark Gerretsen, M.P.