



CANADA RESEARCH CHAIRS STEERING COMMITTEE RESPONSE TO THE TENTH-YEAR EVALUATION OF THE CANADA RESEARCH CHAIRS PROGRAM

General Comments

The Canada Research Chairs Program Steering Committee¹ is pleased to note that the Tenth-Year Evaluation of the Canada Research Chairs Program found that the program is relevant, successful and well-implemented. The report also found that there is a continued need for the program, and underscored that the responsibility for ensuring its continued success is shared jointly by the program and its participating institutions. The report put forward seven recommendations, which the Steering Committee has carefully considered, as outlined below.

The Canada Research Chairs Program is one of Canada's flagship research and development support programs. The Steering Committee is of the view that, after 10 years, and given the changing context of research and development, it would be appropriate to take a closer look at the program and, in particular, to explore ways in which the program could enhance its impact and contribute even more to the long-term vitality of the entire innovation system.

Over the next several months, program management will engage institutions as partners in the delivery of the program, in order to identify potential improvements to the program that would maximize its impact. As part of that analysis, program management will explore mechanisms to respond to certain of the evaluation's recommendations, as discussed below.

The Steering Committee would like to take this opportunity to thank the institutions and chairholders for their dedicated collaboration during the first 10 years of the Canada Research Chairs Program. The committee looks forward to this continued partnership as the program moves forward.

Evaluation Report Recommendation 1

Revise and/or index the CRCP award amounts to ensure that the program can continue to effectively meet its objectives to attract and retain excellent researchers and to enhance the capacity of universities to produce and apply new knowledge.

Management Response

The Steering Committee is pleased to see that several of the evaluation's findings indicate that the funding provided under the program, as well as the status and prestige associated with the Canada Research Chair title, are contributing to the attraction and retention of leading researchers (findings 7 and 8), and to institutions' and chairholders' capacity to leverage additional research funds (findings 12 and 16). The Steering Committee is also pleased that most universities contribute to the success of Canada Research Chair holders by complementing the funding provided under the program with their own support to their Canada Research Chair holders, either through additional funds or various types of in-kind support (Finding 43).

1. The Steering Committee is composed of the presidents of the three federal research granting agencies (Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council, Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council, and Canadian Institutes of Health Research), the president of the Canada Foundation for Innovation, and the deputy ministers of Industry Canada and Health Canada (or their delegates).

The evidence presented in the evaluation report indicates that the program is currently functioning well and achieving its objectives. The Steering Committee acknowledges that the award values have not changed since 2000 (Finding 37). The committee believes that, within the current budget envelope, a revision of the award value to fully reflect inflation is not in the best interest of institutions and active chairholders, as it would necessitate a decrease in the number of chairs available.

However, the Steering Committee recognizes that, as the award values have not changed since 2000, universities have increasingly allocated Canada Research Chair award funding to chairholders' salaries (Finding 37), which leaves less to dedicate to research activities. The committee recognizes that this can create challenges for researchers, especially early-career researchers and foreign recruits, who may lack experience in successfully obtaining additional funding to establish their programs of research. In collaboration with institutions, the Canada Research Chairs Program will continue to monitor the impact of the award value on the success of the program.

Evaluation Report Recommendation 2

Address the short-term and long-term risks and problems associated with the transition and retention of Tier 2 chairholders after the end of their second terms.

Management Response

The Steering Committee is pleased that the evaluation demonstrates that the two-tier system is effective and appropriate for ensuring long-term capacity-building. The findings also reveal, however, that there is a perception in the research community that the different duration and renewal policies of the two tiers result in difficulties in transitioning between the tiers, and that concerns over the two-tier system have been heightened recently as the first cohorts of Tier 2 Chairs approach the end of their second term.

The Steering Committee wishes to clarify that Tier 2 Chairs are not meant to be a feeder group to Tier 1 Chairs. The intent of Tier 2 Chairs is to provide emerging researchers with support that will kick-start their careers. In this respect, the evidence indicates that the two-tier system, with the current term durations and renewal policies, is achieving its objectives. The Steering Committee wishes to underscore that it is part of the universities' role to have a succession plan for their Tier 2 Chairs.

As the majority of current Tier 2 Chairs will reach the end of their second term in the years to come, program management will work with institutions to monitor the career path of Tier 2 Chairs after their second term, in order to better understand the impact of the two-tier system on the attraction and retention of emerging researchers.

Evaluation Report Recommendation 3

Provide the means to ensure that existing chairholders complete their Chair tenure, even if their institution loses Chairs through the reallocation process.

Management Response

The biannual allocation of chairs is an integral part of the Canada Research Chairs Program. It is a dynamic allocation process that recognizes the changes in research success at individual institutions, as measured by each institution's share of federal research funding. The Steering Committee recognizes that the reallocation of Chairs every two years can be disruptive to universities that lose Chairs, and makes longer-term planning more challenging. However, information regarding federal research funding through the granting agencies is publicly available, allowing universities to monitor

their performance in attracting research funding. Failure to do so may result in disruptions that negatively impact the reputation of the Canadian research system.

The program has implemented measures in recent years (e.g., the corridor of flexibility—a phase-out funding mechanism for Chairs lost through the allocation process—and allowing chairholders to retain their title until the end of their term) to minimize the impact of the biannual allocation process. Program management will work with institutions to explore additional mechanisms for minimizing the disruption caused by the loss of Chairs at an institution.

Evaluation Report Recommendation 4

Reconsider the allocation formula to progressively increase the proportion of CRCP Chairs in SSH disciplines.

Management Response

The Steering Committee recognizes that the allocation of Canada Research Chairs to various disciplines via the three granting agency mandates generates dissatisfaction in some sectors.

The decision to modify the allocation of Chairs by agency mandate is a policy decision governed by Cabinet. Therefore, any change to the allocation would require a Cabinet decision.

Evaluation Report Recommendation 5

Provide advice and guidance to universities on best practices for CRCP implementation, and establish a formal, accessible, and open mechanism in order to assist chairholders' interactions with the CRCP and/or their universities in cases where there is a perception that the award is not being adequately managed (including during the nomination/renewal process and post-award administration).

Management Response

It appears from the evaluation report that, in a small number of cases, the program's full potential was not being realized because a chairholder had not received the support to enable his or her success in a timely manner, and that chairholders may have limited recourse in instances where they perceive that their original agreement with the institution has not been respected.

The Steering Committee understands the rationale for Recommendation 5, but does not believe that it is program management's role to intervene in the employer-employee relationship that exists between the university and its chairholders. The committee continues to respect university autonomy and seeks to enhance the current relationship between the program and institutions, in order to ensure the continued success of the program. In this context, program management will, in partnership with institutions, explore mechanisms to increase monitoring of chairholders' progress, to quickly resolve any issues arising, and to ensure that the program is achieving its objectives.

Evaluation Report Recommendation 6

Require that universities be more transparent in their Chair selection and renewal processes to both increase the success of chairholders and minimize unintended effects among non-CRCP faculty.

Management Response

The Canada Research Chairs Program has measures in place to promote transparency with respect to how hiring practices within universities are applied to Canada Research Chair recruitment and appointment processes. For example, the program requires that for each Canada Research Chair

nomination a senior university official attests that the recruitment and nomination process was fair, open and transparent.

The Steering Committee acknowledges that lack of transparency in appointment processes, real or perceived, can create concerns, as the evaluation findings point out. Program management encourages universities to make public the policies that guide decisions regarding such issues as the selection of Canada Research Chair candidates, the packages that are offered to Canada Research Chairs, and the renewal of Canada Research Chairs. Program management will also explore, in collaboration with universities, means to encourage all institutions to be more transparent in their allocation of Canada Research Chairs across faculties and departments.

Evaluation Report Recommendation 7

Ensure that all chairholders receive timely and adequate cross-organizational support for their research program.

Management Response

The Steering Committee believes that for the Canada Research Chairs Program to continue to be successful, program management must work in partnership with the institutions to further enable chairholders to access levels of support (such as infrastructure, administrative support, and funding to support research activities) to enable their success. Several universities have demonstrated exemplary practices in ensuring the success of their chairholders. The Steering Committee encourages all institutions to take these matters into consideration at the time of recruitment of a chairholder, and to monitor the support provided throughout the chairholder's term.

In addition, program management will look for ways to help both the chairholders and institutions in this regard. First, program management will work with universities to ensure that chairholders have the information they need regarding what sources of support are available, what to expect in terms of timelines, etc.

Working in partnership with universities, program management will also further explore the reasons why certain chairholders do not have access to support to enable the activities outlined in their proposed research program, and will identify any related structural problems in program design that may exist, as well as possible program mechanisms that could mitigate these problems.