



RESPONSE TO THE FIFTH-YEAR EVALUATION OF THE CANADA RESEARCH CHAIRS PROGRAM

GENERAL COMMENTS

The Steering Committee is pleased to note that the *Fifth-Year Evaluation of the Canada Research Chairs Program* is, overall, extremely positive. The majority of the issues discussed in the evaluation appear to derive from concerns about the permanence of the funding and the long-term management of the program. We are confident that these issues can be addressed within the program's existing mandate and by the existing authorities.

EVALUATION REPORT RECOMMENDATION 1

Continue the Canada Foundation for Innovation (CFI) component of the Canada Research Chairs . . .

STEERING COMMITTEE COMMENT

The Steering Committee supports this recommendation. The CFI contribution is indeed critical to the continued success of the program. By setting aside \$250 million for the 2,000 Canada Research Chairs, CFI demonstrated its commitment to providing access to infrastructure funding for both newly recruited Chairs and for infrastructure upgrades for existing Chairs.

The CFI board of directors has made the decision to continue funding the Canada Research Chairs Program. Specifically, in October 2005 the foundation will launch its new Leaders Opportunity Fund, which replaces and expands two existing funding mechanisms: the New Opportunities Fund and the Canada Research Chairs Infrastructure Fund. By enabling institutions to access additional infrastructure funds for Canada Research Chairs, the Leaders Opportunity Fund will further enhance their ability to meet the objectives of attracting and retaining the best researchers. As is the case currently, it will be up to the universities to decide whether to request infrastructure support. The Chairs program will continue to apply existing peer-review mechanisms for evaluating Chairs nominations and any associated requests for CFI infrastructure support.

STEERING COMMITTEE DECISION 1

Infrastructure support for Canada Research Chairs, including renewals, will be available through CFI's new Leaders Opportunity Fund as of October 2005.

EVALUATION REPORT RECOMMENDATION 2

In order to sustain the success of the program over the long term, universities and senior management should address strategic issues and risks associated with the ongoing operation of, and participation in, the program. For example: how the Chairs program will be managed on an ongoing basis, planning for when Tier 2 Chair terms expire . . .

STEERING COMMITTEE COMMENT: ALLOCATION OF CHAIRS

The Canada Research Chairs Program is a permanent program. And the allocations to universities will remain a permanent feature of the program. At the same time, there are a finite number of Chairs to be distributed among all institutions that qualify for a Chairs allocation, including those institutions that are coming on board for the first time as a result of having increased their share of federal granting agency funding. The members of the committee are in agreement that the program should continue to allocate Chairs as it does now; that is, proportional to each institution's share of granting agency funding. The committee also acknowledges that some universities will lose Chairs as a result of a decline in their relative performance.

In all cases, the principles of fairness, empowering institutions, flexibility, protecting incumbents, and respecting program policy and philosophy will continue to guide the Steering Committee in its administration of the program and in its relationships with the universities.

The committee has therefore taken the following decisions:

STEERING COMMITTEE DECISION 2

The Chairs Secretariat will calculate Chair allocations every two years and will announce the next revised allocations to the universities in November 2006. We hope this will minimize disruptions and enable the universities to plan better for the deployment of their Chairs. The Secretariat and the Steering Committee may consider changing calculation of allocations to every three years.

STEERING COMMITTEE DECISION 3

The Secretariat will provide new institutions with a Chair allocation as soon as they become eligible and will thereafter factor their granting agency support and allocations into the recalculation process every two years.

STEERING COMMITTEE COMMENT: CORRECTIONS OF GRANTING AGENCY DATA

The Secretariat periodically receives corrections to the granting agency data on which calculations of Chairs allocations are based. Such corrections can result in changes, albeit modest ones, to universities' allocations. The Secretariat will only use this corrected data to make modifications to allocations if a university thereby stands to gain a Chair. Revised data will be integrated into the next Chair calculations.

STEERING COMMITTEE DECISION 4

In the same manner that institutions receive a Chair allocation for the first time, the Secretariat will immediately compensate institutions which stand to gain Chairs as a result of correction of errors in the data that formed the basis of recalculation.

STEERING COMMITTEE DECISION 5

Universities must submit successful nominations for all expired Chairs by the intake date of December 2005. Should no successful nomination be submitted in December 2005, the Secretariat will reclaim the Chair and place it in a reserve. Similarly, after December 2005, the Secretariat will automatically reclaim Chairs as they expire and add them to the reserve.

STEERING COMMITTEE COMMENT: RECLAIMING CHAIRS LOST THROUGH THE RECALCULATION OF ALLOCATIONS PROCESS

If an institution's performance decreases relative to other institutions to the extent that the next recalculation of Chair allocations results in that institution's allocation being reduced, the Secretariat will reclaim, as appropriate, one or more of its unoccupied Chairs. Should all the institution's Chairs be occupied, the Secretariat will negotiate with the university how to reclaim the lost Chair allocation.

The Steering Committee anticipates three principal mechanisms for reclaiming such lost Chairs. This flexibility will ensure that the program remains sensitive to the individual circumstances of universities across the country.

(1) Phasing out funding using a sliding scale of decreasing support (100–50–0 per cent) to ease the transition. Protecting incumbents is particularly important. Therefore, institutions with a decreasing share of the granting agency funding will not lose a particular Chair; rather, unless a Chair is subsequently regained, their total funding envelope will decrease over time.

(2) Using the corridor of flexibility to allow universities to modify the tier or granting agency of lost Chair allocations. For example, a university may use the corridor of flexibility to exchange a vacant Tier 1 SSHRC Chair for a Tier 1 NSERC Chair lost through the reallocation process.

(3) Reclaiming lost Chairs through agreements with universities not to renew Chairs whose mandates will be expiring in the near future.

STEERING COMMITTEE DECISION 6

Should a university lose one or more Chairs as a result of the recalculation exercise, the Secretariat will withdraw any unoccupied Chairs immediately. Should all Chairs previously allocated be occupied, the Secretariat will negotiate with the university a procedure for reclaiming the lost Chair (or Chairs) or, alternatively, the equivalent funding.

EVALUATION REPORT RECOMMENDATION 3

Identify mechanisms to ensure the future recruitment of top researchers.

STEERING COMMITTEE DECISION 7

The committee will renew discussions with the granting agencies to develop recruitment packages for the very best candidates that include financial support from the agencies as well as from the Chairs program and the Canada Foundation for Innovation. The committee will also alert universities to the need to mentor Chairholders in the grant application process as some continue their careers in a new research support culture.

EVALUATION REPORT RECOMMENDATION 4

Broaden the corridor of flexibility by allowing a greater number of “free” Chairs by tier and discipline group.

STEERING COMMITTEE COMMENT: INCREASING UNIVERSITIES’ FLEXIBILITY TO DISTRIBUTE CHAIRS

The Steering Committee supports this recommendation and in fact has already increased the number of “flexible” Chairs for smaller universities and colleges. In addition to their special allocations, universities with seven to 19 Chairs may now propose to distribute up to four of them differently than originally allocated. Universities with six or fewer Chairs have complete flexibility in how they distribute both regular and special Chairs allocations. Since universities are at different points in their faculty renewal process and in their development of areas of research excellence, the corridor of flexibility permits them to propose—so long as they justify it—distribution of Chairs by tier that is different from the agencies’ original allocation.

For universities with more than 20 Chairs that wish to modify their allocated distribution of Chairs by tier, the Secretariat will have the flexibility to respond, on an ad hoc basis, to all requests—so long as demand remains small. Should a substantial number of institutions wish to redistribute Chairs beyond their allotted number, the committee will consider increasing the corridor of flexibility for medium and large universities.

The distribution by tier of interdisciplinary Chairs (i.e., those that fit the mandate of more than one of the three federal granting agencies) will be decided on a case-by-case basis.

STEERING COMMITTEE DECISION 8

In addition to their special allocations, universities with seven to 19 Chairs may propose to distribute up to four Chairs differently than originally allocated. Universities with six or fewer Chairs will have complete flexibility in how they distribute both regular and special allocations. (This decision has already been formally approved and implemented.)

EVALUATION REPORT RECOMMENDATION 5

Revisit the allocation formula by disciplinary sectors (i.e., by granting agency) in light of concerns reported by universities.

STEERING COMMITTEE COMMENT: ALLOCATION OF CHAIRS BY DISCIPLINE

The allocation of Chairs by discipline is part of the original program design. It was not intended to reflect the distribution of faculty at Canadian universities or future staffing requirements at universities. Given the country's existing research capacity, and each discipline's ability to fund research and development, this principle of allocation was deemed the most appropriate to achieve the program's objective of strengthening research excellence by attracting and retaining the best researchers.

This being said, the committee recognizes that there is a level of discomfort in the community with the manner in which the Chairs have been allocated by discipline. A change to the allocation formula is a high-level issue that would require Cabinet approval. Should the Steering Committee decide to proceed with this option, the Secretariat will provide whatever assistance is required.

STEERING COMMITTEE DECISION 9

The decision to request modification of the allocation of Chairs by discipline rests with the members of the Steering Committee, who can choose to pursue this option with Cabinet.

EVALUATION REPORT RECOMMENDATION 6

Increase monitoring of university support (including funding support and teaching relief for Chairs) and the use of [Canada Research Chairs Program] funding . . .

STEERING COMMITTEE COMMENT: IMPLEMENTING A PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT STRATEGY

The committee supports this recommendation. University support for chairholders is crucial to the long-term success of the program. In addition, university support is a major criterion for selecting candidates. The committee appreciates the importance of ongoing monitoring of this aspect of the program.

The Chairs program will be implementing a performance management strategy. Part of this initiative involves revising the requirements for the annual reports that the universities submit to the Secretariat. These revised annual reports will ask for details about support for existing chairholders by discipline and tier, including the teaching loads of chairholders compared to those of other researchers at the universities, and funding that chairholders receive to support their research (both financial and in kind contributions).

Furthermore, chairholders' nomination files provide additional information about the universities' commitment to their Canada Research Chairs. To monitor any variations or discrepancies and their impact on the success of the program, the Secretariat will compare information from the universities' annual reports to the commitments set out in the nomination files.

In addition, the Secretariat will make this information available to the public in aggregate form, by tier and discipline, on an annual basis. This information will give potential nominees a better idea of what kind of teaching relief and financial/in kind support current chairholders receive.

STEERING COMMITTEE DECISION 10

Increase monitoring of university support for Chairs, including research funding and teaching relief, as well as monitoring of the use of the funds provided through the Chairs program. The Secretariat will make this information publicly available in aggregate form (by tier and discipline) on an annual basis.

EVALUATION REPORT RECOMMENDATION 7

Increase the monitoring of the gender distribution among Chair awards . . .

STEERING COMMITTEE COMMENT: THE ISSUE OF GENDER DISTRIBUTION

The committee supports this recommendation. We understand that the evaluation of the issues around gender distribution was conducted during a fixed period of time, during which universities were making progress in the matter of gender balance. However, nominations of women decreased during the nomination cycles that followed the evaluation. As a result, we suggest a two-pronged approach to addressing the gender-balance issue: (1) monitoring gender-balance issues, including ongoing annual monitoring and periodic special studies, and (2) holding universities accountable for meeting gender distribution targets.

MONITORING GENDER-BALANCE ISSUES

We have already assessed the quality and usefulness of the gender data provided in the universities' annual reports and revised strategic research plans. Both these findings and the analyses in the evaluation report will be used to revise the requirements for the universities' annual reports. Changes in the requirements for the annual reports will include, for example, specifying targets by discipline and tier. The program will continue to track gender data for each nomination cycle, including nomination and success rates for women by discipline and tier, as well as the proportion of women nominated externally versus internally. In addition, each year the data collected from the annual reports will be compared to actual number of women nominated.

The Chairs program will also conduct periodic special studies to provide evidence that will inform decision-making on specific issues related to gender balance. Studies already planned include (1) updating the gender analysis study previously conducted by Nicole Bégin-Heick; (2) expanding the study to include international data and provide a more accurate estimate of the pool of women candidates; (3) conducting a gender analysis of why some candidates turn down offers of Chair appointments and why chairholders resign; (4) reviewing universities' justifications for Tier 2 Chairs; and (5) examining the data on the gender of mid-career scholars (i.e., 15 years post-PhD) who are not usually nominated for Chairs . . .

Monitoring and new special studies are important. Nevertheless, the committee does not consider these adequate to deal with the persistent gender distribution problem. This is addressed in decision 12 below.

STEERING COMMITTEE DECISION 11

Monitoring the gender-balance issue will include ongoing annual monitoring as well as periodic special studies.

STEERING COMMITTEE DECISION 12

Universities will be held accountable for distribution targets for female Chairs. Specifically, the universities will be required to establish such targets and communicate them to the Chairs Secretariat. The Secretariat will monitor whether and to what extent these targets are met. The Secretariat will impose sanctions, such as imposing moratoria on new nominations or removing chair allocations, on institutions that fail to meet their targets.

EVALUATION REPORT RECOMMENDATION 8

Revisit the [program's] objective of "ensuring the effective use of research resources through . . . inter-institutional and inter-sectoral collaboration . . ."

STEERING COMMITTEE COMMENT: COLLABORATION AMONG INSTITUTIONS AND SECTORS

The committee recognizes that this objective, as currently worded, is somewhat inconsistent with the program's other objectives, and may seem at odds with the design of the program. The following three paragraphs cite the original objectives and explain the original policy intent behind them. Since these objectives are part of the initial program design, significant changes to them would require Cabinet approval.

Promote the best possible use of research resources through strategic institutional planning. The requirement for institutions to submit strategic research plans addresses this objective. The committee believes that the objective is extremely relevant and we note that universities have come to know each other much better since the Chairs Secretariat began publishing their strategic research plans. We recommend maintaining the requirement to submit strategic research plans as part of the nomination process.

Promote collaboration among institutions. This objective has been met so far only in the Canada Foundation for Innovation component of the program. The fact is, as universities seek candidates to nominate for their allocated Chairs, there is a certain element of competition between institutions, and this does not promote collaboration. However, the committee believes that the objective is worth pursuing, and that it will become more practicable once all 2,000 Chairs are filled. We recommend that, as the program matures and all the Chairs have been filled, the Secretariat explore administrative measures, operational requirements or other mechanisms that could promote increased collaboration among chairholders from different institutions.

Promote collaboration between sectors, in part to maximize the potential for leveraged funds. Although the program does not impede collaboration between sectors, its design and operations do not explicitly promote such collaboration. However, the committee believes that increased collaboration between sectors, and increased leverage of funds, are important for helping institutions become centres of research excellence. In particular, promoting increased leverage of funds may help address other issues raised in the context of the evaluation, notably the report's recommendation 3. Consequently, we recommend that the objective be maintained, and that the Secretariat explore ways to promote it more actively.

STEERING COMMITTEE DECISION 13

The Secretariat will be authorized to consult with central agencies, in collaboration with Industry Canada, to explore the feasibility of changing the objective's wording to better reflect the policy intent described in the committee comments on the evaluation report recommendation. The Steering Committee suggests the following wording: "ensuring the effective use of research resources by eliminating barriers, by exploring alignment with national priorities and by treating Canada Research Chair holders as a strategic resource for the nation."

LIST OF STEERING COMMITTEE DECISIONS

1. Infrastructure support for Canada Research Chairs, including renewals, will be available through the Canada Foundation for Innovation's new Leaders Opportunity Fund as of October 2005.
2. The Chairs Secretariat will calculate Chair allocations every two years and will announce the next revised allocations to the universities in November 2006. We hope this will minimize disruptions and enable the universities to plan better for the deployment of their Chairs. The Secretariat and the Steering Committee may consider changing calculation of allocations to every three years.

3. The Secretariat will provide new institutions with a Chair allocation as soon as the figures become eligible and will thereafter factor their granting agency support and allocations into the recalculation process every two years.
4. In the same manner that institutions receive a Chair allocation for the first time, the Secretariat will immediately compensate institutions which stand to gain Chairs as a result of correction of errors in the data that formed the basis of recalculation.
5. Universities must submit successful nominations for all expired Chairs by the next intake date of December 2005. Should no successful nomination be submitted in December 2005, the Secretariat will reclaim the Chair and place it in a reserve. Similarly, after December 2005, the Secretariat will automatically reclaim chairs as they expire and add them to the reserve.
6. Should a university lose one or more Chairs as a result of the recalculation exercise, the Secretariat will withdraw any unoccupied Chairs immediately. Should all Chairs previously allocated be occupied, the Secretariat will negotiate with the university a procedure for reclaiming the lost Chair (or Chairs) or, alternatively, the equivalent funding.
7. The committee will renew discussions with the granting agencies (SSHRC, NSERC, CIHR) to develop recruitment packages for the very best candidates that include financial support from the agencies in addition to support from the Chairs program and the Canada Foundation for Innovation. The committee will also alert universities to the need to mentor chairholders in the grant application process as they continue their careers in a new research support culture.
8. In addition to their special allocations, universities with seven to 19 Chairs may propose to distribute up to four Chairs differently than originally allocated. Universities with six or fewer Chairs will have complete flexibility in how they distribute both regular and special allocations. (This decision has already been formally approved and implemented.)
9. The decision to request modification of the allocation of Chairs by discipline rests with the members of the Steering Committee, who can choose to pursue this option with Cabinet.
10. Increase monitoring of university support for Chairs, including research funding and teaching relief, as well as monitoring of the use of the funds provided through the Chairs program. The Secretariat will make this information publicly available in aggregate form (by tier and discipline) on an annual basis.
11. Monitoring the gender-balance issue will include ongoing annual monitoring as well as periodic special studies.
12. Universities will be held accountable for distribution targets for female Chairs. Specifically, the universities will be required to establish such targets in their strategic research plans and their annual reports—or, in the case of institutions that have already established targets, review them. The Chairs Secretariat will monitor whether and to what extent these targets are met. The Secretariat will impose sanctions, such as imposing moratoria on new nominations or removing Chair allocations, on institutions that fail to meet their targets.
13. The Secretariat will be authorized to consult with central agencies, in collaboration with Industry Canada, to explore the feasibility of changing the objective's wording to better reflect the policy intent described in the committee comments on the evaluation report recommendation. The Steering Committee suggests the following wording: "ensuring the effective use of research resources by eliminating barriers, by exploring alignment with national priorities and by treating Canada Research Chair holders as a strategic resource for the nation."