
The 2004 CSBMCB Science Policy Questionnaire

An important function of your Society is to accurately represent your interests and concerns to government and decision makers. The usual mechanism for this advocacy is through our support of the lobbying efforts of the Canadian Federation of Biological Sciences (CFBS)

<http://www.cfbs.org/policy.html>.

The goal of the 2004 CSBMCB Science Policy Questionnaire was to give you an opportunity to express your concerns and make suggestions that we will then transmit to the CFBS.

Although the response to the survey was not overwhelming, the data obtained and the perceptive comments of the respondents are an eloquent expression of the concerns of us all. Thus the responses were to some extent predictable and similar -

- Yes there is considerable concern about the level of funding and much anecdotal evidence that operating grant funding has not increased in the past 5 years, and has for many decreased when the inflation cost of scientific supplies and increased personnel support is taken into account.

- Question 2 about the increased size of the scientific work force generated some interesting responses. The recent results of the CIHR operating grants competition with 1687 applications and a success rate of 24% is an unfortunate illustration of the problems that we are all facing. The federal government has made remarkable investments in science in foundations such as the Canada Research Chairs and the Canadian Foundation for Innovation but has not matched this with investments in operating grants that support the investigators and the new infrastructure. This lack of synchrony is having an effect on our ability to make maximum use of these opportunities.

- Question 3 about the stability of research funding and your views on longer term funding generated many suggestions, including the ability of the granting councils to carry funds from one fiscal

year to another. Continuity of research and keeping highly trained research personnel is a major concern and the falling success rate of grant renewals will make this more acute.

- Questions 4 and 5 on the availability of equipment generated the observation that although equipment is easier to obtain, operating funding for its functional upkeep is hard to find.

- Question 6 on graduate student stipends brought some interesting responses. Although the level of funding has been gradually increasing and Canada Graduate Scholarships are certainly well funded, opinion is that we need funding for more students. The linkage between better funding levels for investigators generating greater student enthusiasm was commented upon by several of you.

- Question 7 on the salary levels of post-doctoral fellows generated the comments that the salary levels are too low in Canada.

- Question 8 asked whether the CSBMCB should also represent your concerns to the granting councils. From your comments in response to the other questions it is obvious that many of you are questioning the need for some of the 13 CIHR Institutes and the targeted programs. In contrast there were a few suggestions to create a CIHR Institute of Molecular Biology or Basic Medical Sciences (but none for a CIHR Institute for Biochemistry, Molecular and Cell Biology).

- Question 9 on the allocation at various institutions of the 20% overhead given by the federal government generated some fiery comments. Some were unaware of these funds, but the majority of us are unaware of how our institutions spend them in support of the research that generated them. There was a call for greater transparency and I guess this is a "could try harder" message for some institutions

What happens next?

- We will continue to represent (now, thanks to the survey, more accurately) your concerns to the federal government through the advocacy group of the CFBS.
- We will also meet with the CIHR and with NSERC to transmit your views.
- We will continue to keep you informed of our progress (or lack of it).

The importance of our research for the health of Canadians and the continued development of the knowledge economy are best communicated by us, the researchers. The best recipients of this passion are our elected representatives. Tell your local MP of your successes and frustrations, and perhaps arrange to visit your local MP on “the hill” when you are in Ottawa.

David Thomas, Vice-President CSBMCB