

Canadian Astronomical Society Société Canadienne d'Astronomie Office of the President Bureau du Président

National Research Council, (250) 363-3460

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To: Isabelle Blain,

NSERC, Vice-President of Research Grants and Scholarships\

350 Albert Street Ottawa, Ontario, K1A 1H5

CC: Suzanne Fortier
NSERC, President
350 Albert Street Ottawa, ON, K1A 1H5

Victoria, November 2, 2012

Dear Dr. Blain,

On behalf of the Canadian Astronomical Society, I wish to express strong concerns regarding the following change to the eligibility criteria for NSERC's Postdoctoral Fellowship Program:

"Effective as of the 2013 competition, you can only **apply once** to the NSERC Postdoctoral Fellowships (PDF) Program; however, applicants whose first PDF application was submitted prior to the 2013 competition may submit a second application provided they are within the eligibility window."

My comments relate specifically to the PDF program insofar as it affects astronomy and astrophysics, although I believe they are relevant to other disciplines as well.

NSERC has historically been a strong advocate of the PDF program, recognizing that the health of a scientific community depends, in great part, on the strength and number of its postdoctoral fellows. Such has been NSERC's support and belief for the program, that nearly half of all PDF astronomy positions in Canada are currently NSERC funded¹.

Even so, Canada is painfully lagging behind other countries in allocating funds for postdoctoral positions. This weakens the whole astronomical community: without a strong postdoctoral program, it becomes harder, if not impossible, to fully exploit Canadian investments in the current and next generation of astronomical facilities. Even more serious is the migration of top young Canadian graduates to other countries. Within this context, the PDF program in Canada should be strengthened. It certainly cannot afford to be weakened.

My concern is that the recently enacted changes will damage, perhaps irreparably, NSERC's PDF program and its reputation. Close to 300 students are pursuing a graduate degree in Astronomy at Canadian Universities: with a NSERC PDF success rate of less than 8%, for every meritorious graduate whose application is successful, many more equally deserving applicants will see their application turned

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¹ A review of the postdoctoral program in Canada can be found in the 2010 Long Range Plan for Canadian Astronomy: http://www.casca.ca/lrp2010/11093 AstronomyLRP V16web.pdf

down. Limiting recent graduates to one application will shut out of the process many talented, deserving young researchers. This is contrary to NSERC's mandate of rewarding excellence. No-one will benefit from this change: not the applicants, nor Canadian astronomy, nor NSERC, which will see a decrease in the overall number of high quality applications. No other PDF program, to my knowledge, prevents unsuccessful applicants from reapplying, provided they are within the eligibility window.

On behalf of our members, I therefore urge you to reconsider this restriction. I would be more than happy to discuss the issue further by phone or email if you wish.

Best regards,

Laura Ferrarese

CASCA President