

FWI Update: Focus on Research Excellence

This Fall sees the focus of our *Forward With Integrity (FWI)* initiative move decisively to research. While the University will continue to pursue enhancements to the student experience, to strengthen community-engaged learning and to build and execute a strategic approach to internationalization, we will be making research—the quality, volume and impact of the work we do at McMaster—a priority for this and succeeding years.

\$1 million of FWI funding—by far the majority available this year—is being invested in advancing the research mission and in enhancing the reputation of McMaster as a research powerhouse. The University Research Council has been asked to provide advice on how these funds might be used, with the goal of maximizing the impact of this investment. In addition to the funding from FWI there is also this year a Research Excellence Fund of \$2.5 million being allocated by the Provost from the University Fund to the Faculties. Along with changes made last year to benefits rates and a fund being established within the University to address shortfalls due to the CIHR program transition, it is hoped this will go some way to reducing pressure on researchers and fostering advances in their work.

It is clear that the challenges faced by researchers are considerable and increasing, and in order for McMaster to consolidate and increase its level of research activity we will need to make further investments in support of research, and also ensure that the infrastructure is in place to address the needs of investigators, both those with established programs of research and newly-appointed or newly-tenured researchers who face particular obstacles to getting a program started. To be successful it is vital that the practical needs and long-term aspirations of our researchers are properly reflected in decisions we make about the uses of funding and in the central supports that we provide.

In addition to attending to the appropriate financial and material supports, we also plan to showcase McMaster's considerable research strengths over the coming year, both to highlight the range and significance of research underway and reinforce the standards of excellence that we seek to foster. A number of high-level workshops have already been planned by the office of the Vice-President (Research and International Affairs), and discussions about how best, as an institution, to recognize and promote the work and achievements of our researchers, enable partnerships, and maximize the impact of their research nationally and globally, are currently in progress.

Our goal in the next five years must be to increase significantly McMaster's sponsored research income, as well as our level of research intensity. Because our capacity to increase research

income is always linked in part to factors beyond our direct control—such as budget decisions at the federal level, or government’s decision to favour some areas of research over others—our goal will have to be established only after thoughtful consultation with Associate Deans (Research) in all the Faculties, and with other constituencies having experience and a stake in research funding. The University Research Council, a body established on the recommendation of the FWI Advisory Group, provides one obvious and important mechanism for this consideration.

It is clear too that graduate education and research activity are inextricably linked, so this year will also see a focus across the University on increasing graduate student enrolment at both the Masters and Doctoral levels, as well as ensuring that appropriate academic and financial supports are in place to prepare such students for success. Meeting the goal for Doctoral allocation laid out in the University’s Strategic Mandate Agreement will require a significant increase in total sponsored research income and intensity, which will in turn strengthen our overall research potential.

As we begin the new academic year it is still not entirely clear how the Federal Government will choose to allocate the Canada First Research Excellence Fund (CFREF) included in the budget this past spring. The funding at stake is considerable (\$200 million at steady state), and we are planning to compete for a significant share of it. Although the protocol for distribution has not yet been announced, it is clear from government that the monies will go to project areas in which Canada’s researchers can convincingly compete with—and lead in—the world. It is difficult to imagine any proposal succeeding that is not focused in an area of already demonstrated global leadership and not underpinned by strength in a range of diverse yet relevant disciplines. To this end, a CFREF Project Team composed of Dr. John Brennan (Chemistry), Dr. Bob Pelton (Chemical Engineering), and Dr. Gerry Wright (Biochemistry and Biomedical Sciences), has recently been established. Reporting directly to the President and Vice-Presidents (PVP) group, the Project Team will consult with colleagues, consider possible opportunities, and make recommendations for McMaster’s proposal to this crucial competition to the PVP group.

Further announcements relating to all of these research-focused initiatives will follow over the coming months. That McMaster is a highly-respected, research-intensive institution and a pillar of research excellence has never been in doubt. However, with the talent and expertise at our disposal, I think we can afford to be even more ambitious. I look forward to an exceptional period of research success.



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