



SPEAKING NOTES (OPENING STATEMENT, MAX 5 MINS)

Steve Hranilovic, Vice-Provost & Dean of Graduate Studies

Thank you, Chair.

I appreciate being given the opportunity, on behalf of McMaster University, to present today and offer the broader, institutional perspective of the university. I'm very pleased to be joined by some of my colleagues from McMaster who are bringing their own unique, individual perspectives to the discussion.

Graduate student funding is a challenge for McMaster and its students along with universities across the higher education sector. At the outset I'd like to underscore that McMaster shares the views of many of the organizations that have presented to you already, particularly the Canadian Association for Graduate Studies whose President made important points about additional funding being needed for federal research granting agencies and increases to graduate student and postdoctoral scholarships. I'd like to especially underscore the importance of the government's Advisory Panel on the Federal Research Support System and the disappointing manner in which its key recommendations have not been acted on to date. But we remain hopeful. In terms of how the current environment is impacting McMaster and how we as an institution are managing those challenges, the response is multilayered, and I will provide a brief introduction and welcome further questions the Committee may have.

In February of this year, McMaster struck a Task Force specific to Graduate Funding which is presently hosting campus-wide consultations on the impact of the current funding environment and ways in which the institution can help manage those challenges. Thus far those consultations have yielded some key themes including financial hardship – no surprise given today's inflationary environment – challenges with availability of information, additional barriers faced by international students, and challenges related to provincially imposed PhD timelines.

On the point of the province and its requirements, it also bears mentioning that McMaster, as an Ontario-based university, is also having to manage the unique landscape of how our provincial government is administering its postsecondary system which is adding to the already substantial challenge of federal funding. For example, and as the Committee has no doubt heard before, tuition rates in Ontario were rolled back by 10% in 2019 and have been frozen since. Coupled with the freezing of our provincial operating grant since 2016 and federal grants for Master's and PhD student having not increased since 2003, one starts to see a very depressing picture of the state of postsecondary funding in Canada. To this it bears highlighting that there has been for some time a disconnect between government priorities and the fiscal realities faced by institutions. For example, in terms of global competitiveness, Ontario universities' offers are insufficient to attract top talent. Top US schools will waive tuition for excellent graduate students while European universities can typically charge no tuition at all. Adding to this that our national economic strategy relies so heavily on new Canadians to fuel continued growth and one can appreciate the mismatch.

From the consultations McMaster has had with its community to date, it is clear that some actions can be taken at an institutional level to help manage this current state of affairs. First, we can remove limitations for students that want and need more on-campus employment. We can increase awareness of emergency bursary funds and help ensure that our communications, for example in our letters of offer, help students better understand what funding options and resources are available. And we can also look to help specific faculties close the timing gaps to better meet provincial requirements.

But these are at best stopgap measures and, frankly, ways in which our institution is only managing a situation which is having profoundly negative impact on postsecondary research across Canada. I'll pause my comments there for now and would welcome the opportunity to expand on some of what I've said during the rounds of questions from Members – thank you again so much for this opportunity.