



Roadblocks to success for PhD grads could mean missed opportunities for Canada

News Release

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Canada could be sitting on a significant untapped resource, as the number of PhD holders in this country rises, but persistent barriers make it hard for them to put their skills to work. According to a new expert panel report from the Council of Canadian Academies (CCA), PhD graduates play a critical role in the Canadian economy, but many are missing out on important opportunities to contribute their expertise and bolster growth and innovation.

“The growing number of PhD graduates in Canada could represent a significant opportunity to drive innovation and increase our competitiveness in a global economy,” said M. Elizabeth Cannon, O.C., PhD, FRSC, FCAE, Chair of the Expert Panel. “The difficulties graduates face raise important questions about the nature of PhD education in Canada, and this report considers how stakeholders influence the experience of PhDs and what could be done to address the challenges they confront after graduation.”

PhDs are increasingly faced with career-stalling roadblocks as they attempt to enter the labour market. The traditional path to the professoriate is available to fewer and fewer people, and meaningful jobs outside the academy have not materialized fast enough to fill that gap. A skills mismatch — between what PhDs are trained for during their studies and what employers are seeking — may contribute to the problem and make the bridge from academia to outside employment difficult to navigate. At the same time, PhD graduates may be unaware of their skills and have a hard time describing their value to potential employers.

“This report shines a light on the lived experiences of students, contributing to a better understanding of the career transition challenges they encounter,” said Eric M. Meslin, PhD, FRSC, FCAHS, President and CEO of the CCA. “Addressing their integration into the labour force is essential, particularly in the era of COVID-19 when the need for their complex problem-solving skills takes on even greater urgency.”

The Panel found earnings and employment for PhD graduates vary significantly based on discipline and gender, and men earn more across all disciplines. Women are more likely to be unemployed or find themselves in temporary or part-time employment.

Innovation, Science and Economic Development Canada asked the CCA to examine the main roadblocks faced by PhD students in Canada as they transition into the labour market, and how these challenges differ by field of study.

Degrees of Success details the challenges faced by PhDs as they begin their careers, key factors contributing to these challenges, and promising practices to address them.



Visit www.cca-reports.ca to download the report.

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About the Council of Canadian Academies

The CCA is a not-for-profit organization that undertakes independent, evidence-based expert panel assessments to inform public policy development in Canada. The CCA was founded by three independent organizations that represent some of the finest minds in Canada — the Royal Society of Canada, the Canadian Academy of Engineering, and the Canadian Academy of Health Sciences. Their Fellows and senior decision-makers sit on CCA's Board of Directors and Scientific Advisory Committee, and they are a key source of membership for expert panels. The CCA's founding Academies also provide key guidance and input throughout the assessment process, including expert panel nominations and dissemination processes. For more information about the CCA or its assessments, please visit www.cca-reports.ca.

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