

MANAGEMENT RESPONSE SUMMARY EVALUATION OF THE SSHRC POSTDOCTORAL FELLOWSHIPS PROGRAM

June 2012

Context

Goss Gilroy Inc. was contracted by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council's (SSHRC) Performance and Evaluation Committee to conduct an evaluation of the SSHRC Postdoctoral Fellowships program. The evaluation addressed three issues: program relevance and continued need; success and results; and design, delivery and cost-efficiency. The design for the evaluation was completed in 2011, while data collection and reporting were conducted in 2012. SSHRC implemented the SSHRC Postdoctoral Fellowships program in 1980-81 to provide financial support for recently graduated scholars who did not hold a permanent university appointment and who wished to undertake a specified program of research. The rationale for implementing the SSHRC Postdoctoral Fellowships program—to meet Canada's current and future research needs—emphasized the need to support new and particularly outstanding PhD graduates to help provide highly trained researchers in the social sciences and humanities. The principal objective of the program is to support the most promising new Canadian scholars in the social sciences and humanities and to assist them in establishing a research base at an important time in their research careers.

This evaluation employed multiple lines of evidence to examine the evaluation questions, with responsibility shared between the external consultant, Goss Gilroy Inc., and SSHRC's internal evaluators. The following methods were used during the data collection phase: literature/document review, key informant interviews, survey of applicants, focus groups of award holders, case studies, an expert panel and data analysis (e.g., applicant profile data, cost-efficiency, job postings and analysis of final reports).

Overall, most lines of evidence indicate that the SSHRC Postdoctoral Fellowships program contributes to research outputs and knowledge advancements in all disciplines and areas of the social sciences and humanities, and that these outputs and advancements were being disseminated in academia and beyond. The significant number of publications in peer-reviewed journals seems to demonstrate that the program supports original research, although award holders did not specifically address this objective when reporting on their outputs and outcomes resulting from their SSHRC Postdoctoral Fellowship.

In terms of longer-term outcomes such as influencing changes in knowledge, understanding and/or attitudes, or influencing public policies, practices and/or behaviour, the evaluation was able to find only limited evidence, and case studies suggest that these longer-term outcomes are in fact occurring as a result of continued research following from the funded postdoctoral research. That being said, survey respondents were more likely to report changing knowledge, understanding and/or attitudes rather than influencing public policies, practices and/or behaviour.

Conclusions

The evaluation was a very useful exercise, especially in the context of the renewal of SSHRC's Talent program architecture. The analysis and outcome of the evaluation complemented other studies undertaken as part of this program architecture renewal exercise, and contributed to the development of options for change.

Overall, the quality of the evaluation was high, and its conclusions are consistent with information that SSHRC staff collects on the program.

The attached chart provides more detail on the management response to specific recommendations in the evaluation report.

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Evaluation Recommendations		Program Management Response		
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1. While the context for the SSHRC Postdoctoral Fellowships program has changed since 1994, the program should be continued. Given the contextual shifts, SSHRC should revisit the program objectives to ensure that they reflect the reality that some future PhD graduates will end up in sectors other than academia.	<p>Program objectives should be adjusted to:</p> <p>1.a. Enable outstanding early-career social sciences and humanities researchers, in partnership with their host institutions/organizations, to expand their skill set for a research-intensive career in and beyond academia</p>	<p>Agreed. As part of the renewal of its Talent program, SSHRC plans to adopt a consistent definition of (and consistent criteria for assessing) “research training” across all of its funding opportunities, and to promote the acquisition of a diverse set of skills by award holders. Staff will submit a related implementation plan to SSHRC’s governing council for its late March 2012 meeting.</p> <p>April 27, 2012, update: Recommendations for changes to the SSHRC Talent funding opportunities were approved by SSHRC’s governing council at the March 2012 meeting. The recommendations include a series of specific changes to the SSHRC Postdoctoral Fellowships funding opportunity. These changes will be communicated to the community in fall 2012, and implemented in time for the fall 2013 competition.</p>	Research Training Portfolio; Knowledge Integration	<p>High</p> <p>In progress; to be communicated by fall 2012 and fully implemented by fall 2013.</p>
	1.b. Support individuals who have recently graduated from doctoral programs to consolidate and broaden the scope of their research	<p>Agreed. The SSHRC Postdoctoral Fellowships funding opportunity already supports such individuals, but the related objectives will be reinforced as part of the renewal of SSHRC’s Talent program.</p> <p>April 27, 2012, update: Recommendations for changes to</p>	Research Training Portfolio; Knowledge Integration	<p>Low</p> <p>Summer 2012.</p> <p>In progress; to be communicated by</p>

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		the SSHRC Talent funding opportunities were approved by SSHRC's governing council at the March 2012 meeting. The recommendations include a series of specific changes to the SSHRC Postdoctoral Fellowships funding opportunity. These changes will be communicated to the community in fall 2012, and implemented in time for the fall 2013 competition.		fall 2012 and fully implemented by fall 2013.
	1.c. Fund excellent social sciences and humanities research projects	<p>Agreed. The SSHRC Postdoctoral Fellowships funding opportunity already supports this objective. This support will be further reinforced as part of the renewal of SSHRC's Talent funding opportunities.</p> <p>April 27, 2012, update: Recommendations for changes to the SSHRC Talent program were approved by SSHRC's governing council at the March 2012 meeting. The recommendations include a series of specific changes to the SSHRC Postdoctoral Fellowships funding opportunity. These changes will be communicated to the community in fall 2012, and implemented in time for the fall 2013 competition.</p>	Research Training Portfolio; Knowledge Integration	<p>Low</p> <p>In progress; to be communicated by fall 2012 and fully implemented by fall 2013.</p>
	1.d. Foster the broader mobility of career pathways for emerging scholars to enable them to move into stimulating and	Agreed. As part of the renewal of its Talent program, SSHRC plans to adopt a consistent definition of (and consistent criteria for assessing) "research training" across all of its funding opportunities, and to promote international and intersectoral mobility and	Research Training Portfolio; Partnerships Portfolio;	<p>High</p> <p>In progress; Talent portion of Partnerships Grants,</p>

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	dynamic research environments beyond academia, such as corporate environments, public sector and government organizations, not-for-profit organizations, and university-affiliated service centres	<p>connectedness. SSHRC also intends to create new partnerships opportunities to enrich its suite of research training funding opportunities. Staff will submit a related implementation plan to SSHRC's governing council for its late March 2012 meeting.</p> <p>April 27, 2012, update: Recommendations for changes to the SSHRC Talent funding opportunities were approved by SSHRC's governing council at the March 2012 meeting. The recommendations include a series of specific changes to the SSHRC Postdoctoral Fellowships funding opportunity. These changes will be communicated to the community in fall 2012 and implemented in time for the fall 2013 competition. In addition to the specific changes to the SSHRC Postdoctoral Fellowships, SSHRC will, in 2012, be launching a Talent component to the Partnership Grants. This component will focus on stimulating a dynamic environment for emerging scholars in different sectors of the economy.</p>	Knowledge Integration	regarding research training, to be launched by fall 2012. Fully implemented throughout funding opportunities by fall 2013.
2. In its 2007 strategic plan, <i>Framing our Direction</i> , SSHRC committed to improving its suite of funding opportunities through	2. The ongoing renewal of the Talent program, which supports graduate students and postdoctoral fellows in order to develop the next generation of	Agreed. As part of the renewal of its Talent program, SSHRC plans to adopt a consistent definition of (and consistent criteria for assessing) "research training" across all of its funding opportunities, and to promote the acquisition of a diverse set of skills by award holders, as well as international and intersectoral mobility and	Research Training Portfolio; Knowledge Integration	High In progress; to be communicated by fall 2012 and fully implemented by fall

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the renewal of its overall program architecture.	<p>researchers and leaders, should provide opportunities for greater coherence of the SSHRC Postdoctoral Fellowships program within SSHRC's new program architecture. This entails opportunities for postdoctoral researchers to develop new and original approaches to research (including in relation to SSHRC's priority areas); to cultivate a global outlook (e.g., international experiences related to their research program); and to develop networks and use new and creative modes of knowledge dissemination within and beyond the academic community.</p>	<p>connectedness. Staff will submit a related implementation plan to SSHRC's governing council for its late March 2012 meeting. In addition, SSHRC will examine whether its priority areas should be applicable to fellowships and scholarships for graduate students and postdoctoral researchers.</p> <p>April 27, 2012, update: The question of whether SSHRC's priority areas should apply to the scholarships and fellowships funding opportunities was discussed at the March 27, 2012, Program Architecture Advisory Committee meeting. Senior management and members of the committee discussed the issue and recommended waiting for the results of the Imagining Canada's Future project, before deciding whether to incorporate the newly identified priority areas into the Talent program. For the time being, the status quo should be maintained, that is, special funding for priority areas will not be available in the scholarship and fellowships programs.</p> <p>Recommendations for changes to the SSHRC Talent funding opportunities were approved by SSHRC's governing council at the March 2012 meeting. The recommendations include a series of specific changes to the SSHRC Postdoctoral Fellowships funding opportunity. These changes will be</p>		<p>2013.</p> <p>Possible implementation of priority areas once the recommendations of Imagining Canada's Future are completed; 2013-14.</p>

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		communicated to the community in fall 2012, and implemented in time for the fall 2013 competition.		
3. SSHRC should reconsider the amount of the award for successful SSHRC Postdoctoral Fellowships applicants. In line with the recommended revised objectives, the award should be increased to between \$40,000 and \$50,000 to allow researchers to focus on their postdoctoral experience rather than look for additional sources of income.	3.1. It is acknowledged that the total SSHRC Postdoctoral Fellowships program funding envelope may not change. For postdoctoral awards held abroad, the amount of the award could be increased by an additional \$5,000, based on location of tenure. The incremental amount requested in the application would need to be fully justified.	<p>Partially Agreed. As part of the renewal of its Talent program, SSHRC intends to incorporate the current research allowance into the SSHRC Postdoctoral Fellowships award, within the current funding envelope. This would increase the SSHRC Postdoctoral Fellowships award from the current \$38,000/year to \$40,500/year. This would result in administrative savings for both award holders and SSHRC. The value of the current research allowance is too small in relation to the fellowship award to warrant a request for justifications regarding research needs or location of tenure.</p> <p>April 27, 2012, update: Recommendations for changes to the SSHRC Talent funding opportunities were approved by SSHRC's governing council at the March 2012 meeting, as was an implementation plan. The recommendations include a series of specific changes to the SSHRC Postdoctoral Fellowships funding opportunity. These changes will be communicated to the community in fall 2012, and implemented in time for the fall 2013 competition.</p>	Research Training Portfolio; Finance	<p>Medium</p> <p>In progress; to be communicated by fall 2012 and fully implemented by fall 2013.</p>
	3.2. To address diverse research needs across all social sciences and humanities disciplines, the amount of the research allowance should be increased and awarded	<p>Medium</p> <p>In progress; to be communicated by fall 2012 and fully implemented by fall 2013.</p>		

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	based on full justification of research needs. The allowable amount would range between \$2,000 and \$7,500.			
4. The SSHRC Postdoctoral Fellowships program's design and delivery features should be tailored to align with proposed program objectives (Recommendation 1). Award holders should be allowed to tailor their overall postdoctoral experience to their learning and research needs relative to their career path, whether in or beyond academia (e.g., the degree to which	4.1. Application requirements (including letters of appraisal), eligibility criteria, as well as other delivery tools and mechanisms, should be adjusted to reflect the new program objectives.	<p>Agreed. As part of the renewal of its Talent program, and along the lines of what has been put in place for the tri-agency Banting Postdoctoral Fellowships Program, SSHRC intends to develop a requirement for a training plan as part of applications to the SSHRC Postdoctoral Fellowships funding opportunity. SSHRC also plans to adopt a consistent definition of (and consistent criteria for assessing) "research training" across all of its funding opportunities, and to promote international and intersectoral mobility and connectedness. Staff will submit a related implementation plan to SSHRC's governing council for its late March 2012 meeting.</p> <p>April 27, 2012, update: Recommendations for changes to the SSHRC Talent funding opportunities were approved by SSHRC's governing council at the March 2012 meeting. The recommendations include a series of specific changes to the SSHRC Postdoctoral Fellowships funding opportunity. These changes will be communicated to the community in</p>	Research Training Portfolio; Knowledge Integration	<p>High.</p> <p>In progress; to be communicated by fall 2012 and fully implemented by fall 2013.</p>

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teaching is required and/or appropriate, and the degree and/or nature of international experiences).		fall 2012, and implemented in time for the fall 2013 competition.		
	4.2. The evaluation and adjudication processes—namely, committee membership, evaluation criteria, scoring scheme and relevant documentation, should also be reviewed to reflect the new program objectives.	Agreed. In addition to what is mentioned in relation to recommendation 4.1 above, SSHRC invited, on a pilot basis, observers to its 2012 adjudication for the SSHRC Postdoctoral Fellowships funding opportunity. SSHRC intends to continue this practice in order to obtain valuable input to continuously improve the adjudication, scoring schemes, and documentation required for its SSHRC Postdoctoral Fellowships funding opportunity.	Research Training Portfolio; Knowledge Integration	High Completed.
5. SSHRC should place greater emphasis on securing the host institution's commitment to developing the award	5.a. Host institutions should provide evidence of Institutional support for the proposed program of work.	Agreed. The SSHRC Postdoctoral Fellowships funding opportunity already requires the submission of an institutional nomination form, which indicates institutional support. This requirement will be reinforced as part of the renewal of SSHRC's Talent program.	Research Training Portfolio; Knowledge Integration	Low In progress; to be communicated by fall 2012 and fully implemented by fall

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holder's research potential, as well as positioning him/her for a successful research-intensive career.		April 27, 2012, update: Recommendations for changes to the SSHRC Talent funding opportunities were approved by SSHRC's governing council at the March 2012 meeting. The recommendations include a series of specific changes to the Postdoctoral Fellowships funding opportunity. These changes will be communicated to the community in fall 2012, and implemented in time for the fall 2013 competition.		2013.
	5.b. Host institutions should provide evidence of institutional commitment to developing research potential and positioning the award holder for a successful research-intensive career, including an individualized learning and development plan, to be discussed with the award holder.	Agreed. As part of the renewal of its Talent program, and along the lines of what has been put in place for the tri-agency Banting Postdoctoral Fellowships Program, SSHRC intends to develop a requirement for a training plan as part of applications to the SSHRC Postdoctoral Fellowships funding opportunity. Staff will submit a related implementation plan to SSHRC's governing council for its late March 2012 meeting. April 27, 2012, update: Recommendations for changes to the SSHRC Talent funding opportunities were approved by SSHRC's governing council at the March 2012 meeting. The recommendations include a series of specific changes to the SSHRC Postdoctoral Fellowships funding opportunity. These changes will be communicated to the community in fall 2012, and implemented in time for the fall 2013 competition.	Research Training Portfolio; Knowledge Integration	High In progress; to be communicated by fall 2012 and fully implemented by fall 2013.

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	5.1. In support of this recommendation, SSHRC should develop, in consultation with key stakeholders (e.g., institutions, selection committees), a guidance document for potential host institutions regarding SSHRC Postdoctoral Fellowships program requirements: for example, office space, access to faculty, library, professional development, networking opportunities, etc. As well, SSHRC should monitor implementation of institutional commitments with appropriate reporting tools and mechanisms.	<p>Agreed. SSHRC will consult with stakeholders in order to obtain further input to be incorporated into existing guidance documentation. As part of a larger examination of the co-management of its research training funding, and in addition to the forthcoming research achievement reports to be required of award holders, SSHRC will examine how it could better monitor the institutional commitments to develop award holders.</p> <p>April 27, 2012, update: Recommendations for changes to the SSHRC Talent funding opportunities were approved by SSHRC's governing council at the March 2012 meeting. The recommendations include a series of specific changes to the SSHRC Postdoctoral Fellowships funding opportunity. These changes will be communicated to the community in fall 2012, and implemented in time for the fall 2013 competition. They include better reporting mechanisms and tools to be available to the community as of 2013.</p>	Research Training Portfolio; Corporate Performance and Evaluation	<p>Medium</p> <p>In progress; to be communicated by fall 2012 and fully implemented by fall 2013.</p>
6. A performance measurement strategy should be developed for	6. A performance measurement strategy should be developed for	<p>Agreed. SSHRC will develop a performance measurement strategy for the SSHRC Postdoctoral Fellowships funding opportunity, based on the related revised logic model and</p>	Corporate Performance and Evaluation;	<p>Medium</p> <p>Fall 2012.</p>

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the SSHRC Postdoctoral Fellowships program.	the SSHRC Postdoctoral Fellowships program, linked to the revised program objectives within the context of the ongoing renewal of the Talent program. This performance measurement strategy should be consistent with the one developed for the Banting program and be based on the revised program's logic model in reflecting the expected outcomes and logical links between program activities and benefits.	consistent with what has been put in place for the tri-agency Banting Postdoctoral Fellowships Program.	Research Training Portfolio	
7. With respect to performance measurement reporting tools, SSHRC should advance its development and implementation of the	7.1. The Achievement Report for Talent development will capture data on research results, skills acquired/expanded, mobility, other funding sources, work experience,	Agreed. SSHRC is currently finalizing the development of the program-wide research achievement report, which will be used for the SSHRC Postdoctoral Fellowships funding opportunity.	Corporate Performance and Evaluation; Research Training Portfolio; Knowledge	High Fall 2013.

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new achievement reporting system within the context of its renewed program architecture. This new achievement reporting system will be used to collect achievement results data for the Talent, Insight and Connection umbrella programs, and therefore for the SSHRC Postdoctoral Fellowships program as well.	knowledge mobilization and recognition. The new reporting system will allow better communication of results and outcomes to award holders, researchers, institutions and partners.		Integration	
	7.2. Progress Reports should continue to be used for purposes related to determining continued eligibility and to administration and monitoring.	Agreed. In the short term, eligibility will continue to be monitored using progress reports; however, the use of the new CRM platform will be explored as a possible tool for monitoring eligibility in the future.	Research Training Portfolio	Medium Fall 2013.
8. The evaluation found that there were limited research and data regarding postdoctoral researchers in the social sciences and humanities in Canada and internationally. As such, there was great interest expressed by a number	8.1. SSHRC should liaise with the above-mentioned organizations/groups to explore opportunities to contribute to and benefit from potential initiatives and/or studies related to the social sciences and humanities postdoctoral experience.	Agreed. SSHRC will continue its current liaison activities with the key stakeholder associations and organizations such as the Canadian Association of Graduate Studies (CAGS) and the Canadian Association of Postdoctoral Scholars. More specifically, SSHRC will continue its active participation in the Canadian Committee on Postdoctoral Scholars, as well as its new membership in two CAGS online list serves, for postdoctoral co-ordinators and for senior administrators. SSHRC will also continue to gather invaluable data and evidence from past recipients of	Research Training Portfolio; Policy Planning, Governance and International; Corporate Performance and Evaluation	Low Completed.

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of organizations and groups currently exploring the issue of the incremental value of the postdoctoral experience (e.g., Canadian Association of Graduate Studies, Canadian Association of Postdoctoral Scholars, Conference Board, Industry Canada, etc.) in addressing the context of social sciences and humanities disciplines more specifically.	8.2. SSHRC should lead and coordinate specific studies, or components thereof, if there are remaining issues that need to be addressed. Possible topics could include the state of hiring practices for social sciences and humanities within the academic and other sectors (and the related impact of a SSHRC Postdoctoral Fellowship); indirect support for postdoctoral researchers in the social sciences and humanities; and gaining a better understanding of the current trends in the SSHRC postdoctoral population (e.g., reasons	<p>Doctoral Awards and SSHRC Postdoctoral Fellowships through its annual Survey of Scholarships and Fellowships.</p> <p>Partially Agreed. In the short term, SSHRC does not feel that additional studies are required at this time. However, SSHRC will continue to liaise with stakeholders, and to consider further studies in the future regarding postdoctoral researchers in the social sciences and humanities in Canada.</p>	Research Training Portfolio; Policy Planning, Governance and International; Corporate Performance and Evaluation	<p>Low</p> <p>In progress; to be communicated by fall 2012. Possible implementation by 2013-14.</p>

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	for not applying for funding; employment outcomes; cultural/disciplinary differences, etc.).			