



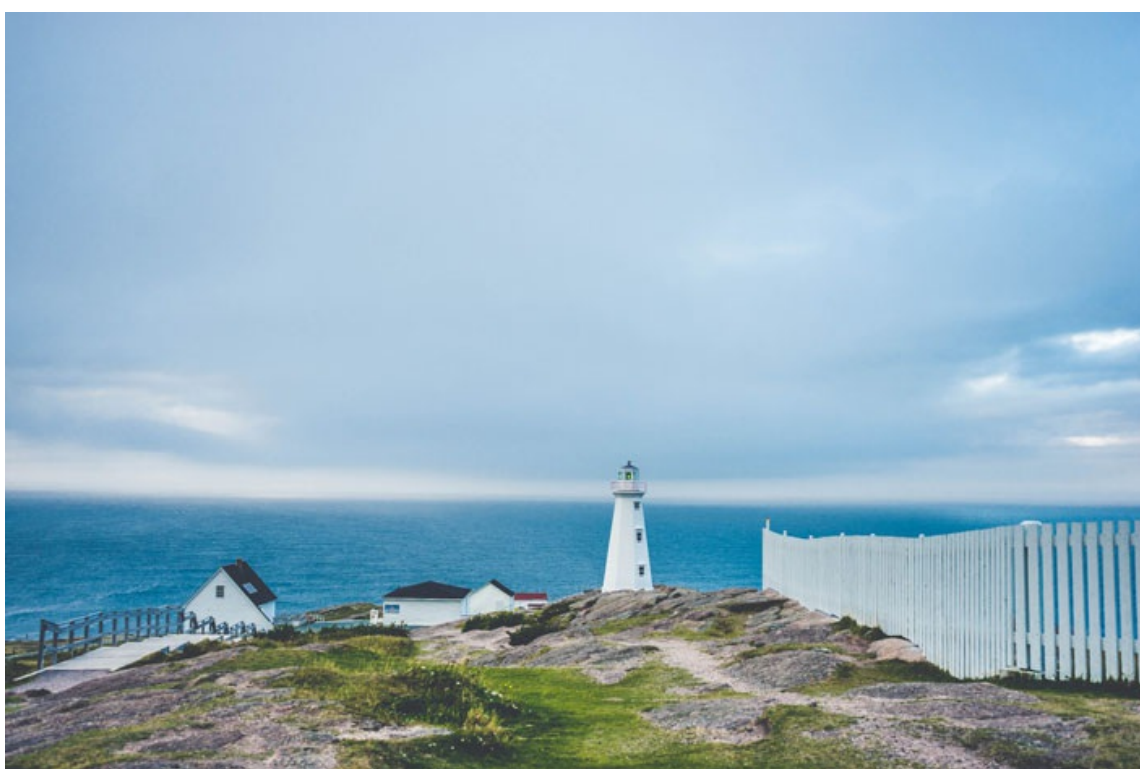
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Canada's Fundamental Science Review

by Caroline Winter | 11 October 2017 | English, Observations, Observations and Responses | 0 comments



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This observation was written by Sarah Milligan. Please see [a response to Canada's Fundamental Science Review](#) written by [INKE Partnership member](#), Brian Owen.

At a glance

Title	Canada's Fundamental Science Review
Creators	A panel of nine of Canada's top scientists chaired by David Naylor
Publication date	2017-04-10
Keywords	Canadian government; science; funding agencies; recommendations; #SupportTheReport

In April 2017, [Canada's Fundamental Science Review](#), written by a panel of nine of Canada's top scientists and chaired by former U of Toronto president David Naylor, was released. Commissioned by

Science Minister Kirsty Duncan, the review (also known as the Naylor Report) is the first review of its kind in Canada since the 1970s. Working from 1,275 written submissions and roundtables that engaged 230 researchers across the country, the 243-page Naylor Report includes 35 recommendations. The panel considers the multiple structures that distribute the \$5.2 billion Canada spends on funding extramural research and how that money is being spent.

Amongst other conclusions, the panel determines that

“the recent erosion of Canada’s research competitiveness is linked to changes in federal funding for extramural research that have both constrained funding per researcher, and directed funding preferentially to priority-driven and partnership-oriented research” (xxiv).

The panel outlines the challenges that have exacerbated this situation and recommends “substantial improvements in governance, oversight, and advice” (xxiv). One of the recommendations is for a \$386 million increase in funding in the first year building to \$1.3 billion in the fourth year. This rapid increase of funding would serve “to redress the imbalance caused by differential investments favouring priority-driven research over the past decade” (xxviii). The report also calls for the creation of a National Advisory Council on Research and Innovation (NACRI) to provide oversight and bring cohesion to the four agencies: the [Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council \(NSERC\)](#), the [Canadian Institutes of Health Research \(CIHR\)](#), the [Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council \(SSHRC\)](#) and the Canada Foundation for Innovation (CFI).

The *Globe and Mail*’s [article](#) following the report’s release highlighted the focus on young researchers in the report, quoting panel member and Nobel-prize winning physicist, Art McDonald: “[Younger researchers] are finding it difficult in the present system” (10 April 2017, n. p.). Duncan herself discussed the report with the *National Post* on June 28 2017, she said, “There is not a quick fix here. It’s going to take time to make up that lost ground. It takes time to turn the Queen Mary around.” In response to the proposed NACRI, Duncan said,

“I believe that as elected officials ... who are responsible to the people who put them in government, we have to be prudent with taxpayer’s money. We have to be accountable . . . I don’t think putting in place an unelected body, I don’t think it should have say over funding. That’s not on” (Blackwell, n. p.).^[1]

In response, Naylor clarified that the report does not propose a council that makes decisions, but rather one that advises on spending and policy. Naylor also reiterates the importance of “peer-reviewed mechanisms that make evidence-based decisions about who gets funding” (*ibid*).

Writing for *Maclean’s*, Paul Wells claims that the report “represents Canadian research scientists’ side of a power struggle” with consecutive Canadian governments since Chrétien left office. Wells focuses on the report’s call for an increase in spending on “independent investigator-led research” (that is, fundamental or basic science) rather than a sole focus on “priority-driven targeted research” (that is, applied science). “You see the imbalance,” writes Wells, “on one side, ribbons to cut. On the other, nerds experimenting on tapeworms” (n. p.). The most important thing according to Wells is for the government to listen to scientists and allow them to explain how science gets made. Many other media outlets, both academic and non-academic have written articles on the Report since it was released, The Canadian Science Policy Centre has compiled a [comprehensive collection of these](#).

Many academics and academic institutions have declared their support for the report; indeed, the Twitter hashtag [#SupportTheReport](#) tracks much of the conversation amongst academic and academically-aligned communities since the report’s release. Universities Canada, which took a strong stance in

support of the report, gathered together **statements from representatives of many Canadian universities** including the **University of Victoria**, **Simon Fraser University**, the **McGill University**, **University of Toronto** and **University of British Columbia**, and the **Dalhousie University**, **St Mary's University** and **Cape Breton University**.

Several leading organizations submitted comments and recommendations to the panel, including the **Canadian Association of Research Libraries** and the Canadian Research Knowledge Network. As part of their **submission to the panel**, Compute Canada drew attention to the need for a funding mechanism for national research software services. The Report recommends that Compute Canada and CANARIE be merged into a single organization “with long-term funding and a mandate to lead in developing a national DRI strategy” (xxviii).

The Federation of the Humanities and Social Sciences’ **submission** is cited multiple times throughout the document. Shortly after the report’s release, the Federation released a **briefing note**, which outlined the central message of the report and the report’s remarks on the Humanities and Social Sciences in particular, and compared the report’s recommendations with the Federation’s Review submission. Overall, the Federation strongly welcomed the report’s “unprecedented recognition of the contributions made by the humanities and social sciences” (n. p.). When speaking at the Federation for the Humanities and Social Sciences Congress on May 28, Duncan **thanked** the Federation for its invaluable contribution and quoted from the report: “Research in the social sciences and humanities holds equal promise to help Canada address many of the challenges the nation faces” (Naylor, 112). She continued:

“I truly believe that one of Canada’s key strategic advantages is our social science and humanities. . . . social science and humanities researchers provide meaningful context to research findings in other disciplines, help provide evidence for sound policy-making and train the next generation of critical thinkers. ” (n. p.).

Several months after the report’s publication, the Federation **publicly urged** the Canadian government to follow the panel’s recommendations, and encouraged members of the HSS community to likewise voice their support.

The Naylor Report addresses open scholarship (as open science) in passing, and emphasizes both “the role of research in underpinning innovation and educating innovators” (xxiv) and researchers’ access to the fundamental research of their peers—concerns at the crux of open scholarship. If the Government of Canada does indeed take the report’s recommendations to heart and prioritize funding of independent investigator-led research, it is all the more imperative to ensure that such independent research is shared and available to the rest of the research community, and to the Canadian public as a whole.

Footnote

[1] Duncan gave a similar interview to the *Globe and Mail* on the same day.

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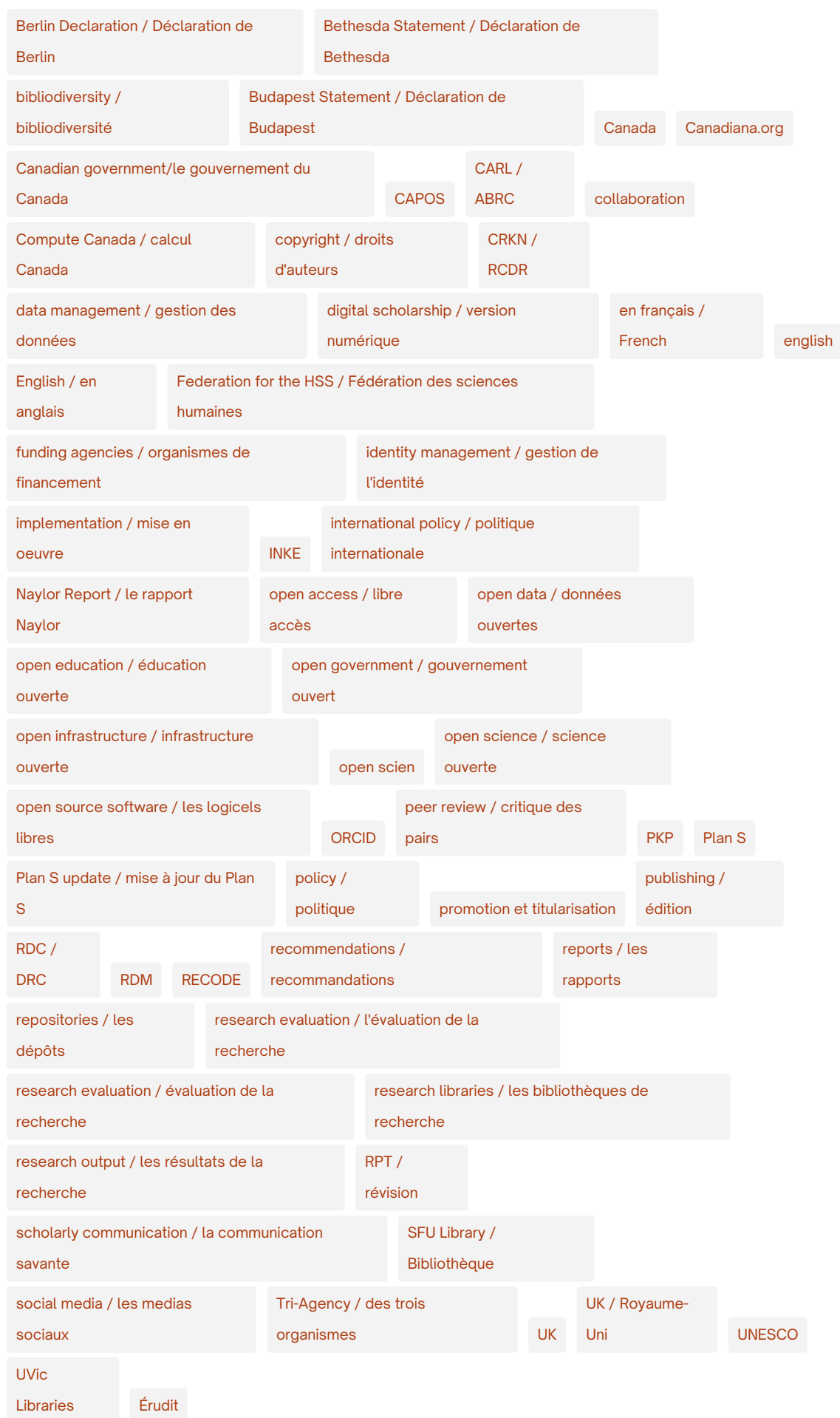
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