



Review of the Council of Canadian Academies – Report of the External Evaluation Panel 2010

A Council Response

A) Introduction

The Council of Canadian Academies and its Board of Governors are pleased to present the *Review of the Council of Canadian Academies – Report from the External Evaluation Panel 2010*. This review was undertaken on the occasion of the Council of Canadian Academies' fifth anniversary.

The Council is an independent, not-for-profit corporation that supports science-based, expert assessments to inform public policy development in Canada. The Council consists of a Board of Governors, a Scientific Advisory Committee and Secretariat. The Council draws upon the intellectual capital that lies within its three Member Academies – the Royal Society of Canada: The Academies of Arts, Humanities and Sciences of Canada; the Canadian Academy of Engineering; and the Canadian Academy of Health Sciences.

A key requirement of the Council's 10-year funding agreement with the Government of Canada is the completion of a formal five-year, independent third-party review. The Council received the External Evaluation Report earlier this year and the Board of Governors has had an opportunity to consider its observations and recommendations at a strategy session in early March. The Council of Canadian Academies concurs with the recommendations and will be working to act on them fully in the months and years to come.

B) Background

The Council's Board of Governors appointed a four-member External Evaluation Panel to carry out the review over the fall and winter of 2009. The Council was honoured to have an eminent group of experts agree to participate in the review process. Members of the External Evaluation Panel were:

- **Margaret Bloodworth**, (Chair) a former senior public servant, including most recently, Associate Secretary to Cabinet and National Security Advisor to the Prime Minister;
- **William Colglazier**, Executive Officer for the National Academy of Sciences in the United States;
- **Luc Vinet**, Rector at the Université de Montreal; and
- **James Wilsdon**, Director of the Science Policy Centre at the Royal Society in London, England.

The External Evaluation Panel was asked to assess the extent to which the Council of Canadian Academies has, to date, fulfilled its mission. The panel assessed the performance of the Council as a whole, addressing the following two questions:

1. Is the Council delivering on the objectives as outlined in its founding documents and also as incorporated in the Funding Agreement?
2. Has the Council added value in informing public debate and decision making in Canada?

C) Key Conclusions and Observations of the External Evaluation Panel

The External Evaluation Panel agreed, without hesitation, that the Council is delivering on the objectives set out in its founding documents and providing value in informing public debate and decision making in Canada. Throughout the Review, observations on the Council's first five years were overwhelmingly positive. The following statements are typical of those found within the report:

"The Council of Canadian Academies is making a notable contribution by providing independent scientific assessments relevant to major public-policy issues."

"In the relatively short time since its creation, the Council has done an excellent job of producing high-quality reports that are being used by decision makers to provide Canadians with better evidence-based public policy."

"The Council is already viewed as highly credible within the federal government, as well as among broader stakeholders and users of its reports."

"The Council's high standards will also provide it with a strong foundation as it continues the longer-term process of evolving its focus from the operational needs of a start-up towards the longer-term strategic needs of a mature organization."

To achieve long-term success, the External Evaluation Panel highlighted five areas of importance where the continued attention of the Council will be required: organizational excellence; relationship with the Member Academies; diversifying sources of topics and assessment mechanisms; stakeholder engagement, communications and outreach; and establishing sustainable funding.

D) The Council's Response

The Council is committed to responding to the report's observations and recommendations. The Council's central focus will be to ensure that its assessments are of the highest quality, and that they provide value for decision makers and deliver impact for Canadians. The External Evaluation Panel noted that "Council's assessments, although only recently produced, have already had significant

impact in federal departments and to some extent more broadly” and that “Council assessments will generate impacts over the next five, or even 10-15 years” (pg. 6).

The Council is pleased to see information generated from assessments is already having an influence on the development of policies and programs, including raising awareness of scientific evidence.

The Council’s first assessment, *“The State of Science and Technology in Canada”* identified four areas of Canadian research strength. These same areas (clusters) then became an important focus in the government’s national policy on Science and Technology, *“Mobilizing Science and Technology to Canada’s Advantage.”* In 2009, the Council released a thorough study on Canadian Innovation, *“Innovation and Business Strategy: Why Canada Falls Short.”* A number of themes addressed within this assessment are reflected within the 2010 Speech from the Throne and Federal Budget.

Assessments are also informing activities outside of Canada’s borders. For example, in the U.S. the National Research Council recently released a study, *“Realizing the Energy Potential of Methane Hydrate for the United States.”* The Expert Panel that conducted this study heavily referenced the Council’s 2008 report, *“Energy from Gas Hydrates: Assessing the Opportunities and Challenges for Canada.”*

The Council is confident that its current set of assessments will also make important contributions to the potential development of regulations and policies related to: biodiversity; research integrity; integrated testing of pesticides; and risk assessment techniques in animal health science.

Ensuring the quality and excellence of Council assessments will continue to be of paramount importance to the organization.

The Council’s Board and Secretariat will ensure strategic and business plans fully address the recommendations made by the External Evaluation Panel. The External Evaluation report addresses five specific areas of importance. The Council response has been developed using these five themes and offers some high-level and strategic activities that will be pursued starting in 2010.

1) Organizational Excellence In the Development of Science Advice

The Council of Canadian Academies is in an evolutionary stage of development, as it is moving beyond its initial start-up period into a mature and established organization. The External Evaluation Panel stated, “We commend the Board for successfully leading the Council through a challenging start-up phase and establishing robust assessment processes that are resulting in high quality reports ... it is timely for the Board to evolve its focus from establishing start-up operations, to addressing longer-term strategic and overarching issues in science and public policy” (pg. 13). The Council welcomes this direction and will seek to engage the Member Academies, key Council clients, and partners in this regard.

Strategic planning will be led by the Council’s Board of Governors and discussions will be undertaken to address a wide range of topics including: Academy relations; funding for the future; diversifying

sources of assessments; and broadening the scope of products offered by the Council. The Board's strategic visioning exercise will support the development of the Council's longer-term strategic plan.

2) Relationship with the Member Academies

The Council of Canadian Academies was founded by the country's three scientific Academies. These Academies – the Royal Society of Canada: The Academies of Arts, Humanities and Sciences of Canada; the Canadian Academy of Engineering; and the Canadian Academy of Health Sciences – are a significant source of intellectual capital in Canada. Each one of these Academies brings a wealth of expertise and value to the Council. The External Evaluation Panel observed, "If the assets of the four organizations are combined in a synergistic way to create a shared and collective vision, the result will be a powerful voice able to encourage enhanced use of science advice in Canadian public policy making" (pg. 4).

In the short term the Council will work with the Academies on developing a *Statement of Common Understanding*, confirming shared objectives and messages. Over the medium term the Council will seek out strategic opportunities to collaborate on the development of assessment questions and work jointly in areas of mutual interest. Additionally, as is the Council's regular practice, Academy Fellows will continue to be engaged in Council activities through membership on the Council's Board, Scientific Advisory Committee and Expert Panels. The Council's success in delivering high quality assessments depends on the volunteer contribution of its Scientific Advisory Committee, expert panel members and report reviewers. These individuals give generously of their time and are ultimately the source of the quality and credibility of Council assessments.

3) Diversifying Sources of Topics and Assessment Mechanisms

The External Evaluation Panel accurately observed, "A core group of federal departments have supplied the Council with an excellent range of topics to date" (pg.5). The Review goes on to suggest that, "Canada would benefit if all federal departments were able to take advantage of Council's services in the robust way being modeled by NRCan [Natural Resources Canada]" (pg. 7). "Furthermore, the Panel believes policy discourse would benefit from having topics suggested by a more diverse range of organizations, such as other kinds of public sector bodies...universities, non-governmental organizations and Canada's Academies" (pg. 5). As such, the Council will be looking to diversify assessment sponsors and identify opportunities to collaborate with its Member Academies on joint assessments.

A strong science voice in support of evidence-based policy should come in many different forms. The External Evaluation Panel noted, "...in the future, in-depth reviews will need to be increasingly supplemented with other mechanisms to provide advice on cutting-edge issues quickly and in response to specific needs" (pg.7). In the U.S., the National Research Council produces 'letter reports' and hosts roundtable sessions that allow a mix of scientific experts and policy makers to meet and discuss issues of interest. In the UK, the Royal Society assembles top scientific and policy minds in conference settings and closes these initiatives with communiqués on findings and conclusions.

The Council will undertake a review of best practices to determine what types of products and services the Council is best positioned to offer, and how the Council could enhance the voice of science in the development of public policy. The Council will also consult with the Government of Canada regarding their future needs.

4) Establishing Sustainable Funding

In 2005 the Council entered into an initial 10-year, \$30 million funding agreement with the Government of Canada. The Council is now at the five-year mark and must consider securing funding for the future. The External Evaluation Panel indicated there is “an urgent need for the Board to develop a long-term strategy for sustainable funding which addresses renewed federal funding, and a diversified funding base” (pg. 14). The Council believes this is critically important for the organization. Immediate attention will therefore focus on developing a *Funding Renewal Roadmap*. It will inform and establish a long-term funding strategy that takes into account diversified funding sources, products, and options that allow for productive collaboration with Member Academies.

5) Stakeholder Engagement, Communications and Outreach

The External Evaluation Panel commented, “Now that the Council has established its credibility and track record, it has the opportunity to undertake more active dissemination of its reports to help ensure they continue to be useful and relevant within ongoing public policy debate” (pg. 6). To date, the Council has completed eight assessments; two more will be launched by the end of 2010; and at least a dozen assessments are in the pipeline.

Moving forward, the Council will seek to extend the reach of its reports through strategic promotion and dissemination. This will be achieved through an enhanced corporate communications strategy and by considering communications at the start of each assessment planning process. In an effort to achieve optimal impact, both within and outside of government, the Council will work to more strategically disseminate its reports and key findings with various audiences and stakeholders. The Council will also seek to partner with sponsoring departments/agencies and its Member Academies to ensure far-reaching dissemination and meaningful impact.

E) Conclusion

The UK’s Royal Society and the National Academies of Science in the U.S. have generations of experience in providing science advice in support of public policy development. The Council was honoured to have senior members from both of these organizations on its External Evaluation Panel, and is gratified by their acknowledgement that the Council of Canadian Academies has already established credibility among international peers. The Council of Canadian Academies looks forward to a long and bright future. We hope our reports and advice will continue to inform national and international dialogues. Our mission is to contribute to shaping evidence-based public policy that is in the public interest.

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