

Canada's Capital University

24 June 2020

Chuck Macdonald
Dean
Faculty of Science

Re: COVID-19 Return-to-work

Dear Chuck,

Thank you for advocating for the Carleton Science faculty and trainees to be able to return to work as quickly as possible. We represent over 30 faculty members with active research programs in the Faculty of Science. We wish to express our significant concerns with the delay in returning to active research. We appreciate that several of the University's guiding documents were originally written with the information available at the time; however, there have been several changes in regulations by both the Federal and Provincial governments since then and we write to propose that the University return-to-work (RTW) approach be refined to reflect these new realities.

The Ontario Government has deemed all types of research to be essential and to resume on May 19th (<https://www.ontario.ca/page/reopening-ontario-whats-each-stage#s-9>). We note with concern that the University's RTW committee keeps referring to the Ontario Emergency Order as means to delay, if not to block return to work for our researchers. This is in direct contravention of the Ontario Government guidelines. Phase 1 of Ontario's *Reopening Ontario* plan provided the legal right and framework to return to research in a safe manner. Our Departments have provided details of measures to protect personnel in research spaces and to coordinate safe return to research for those who wish to do so. Most individual faculty members have submitted "Research Project Resumption Plans" detailing plans for safe resumption of research projects almost a month ago.

We know there is much attention on what other Institutions are doing and some desire to move in lock step with them. We note proudly that at the beginning of the COVID-19 lockdown Carleton led the way in making the right decisions, and making them swiftly. Now, however, we fall significantly behind. Other institutions across Ontario, and in particular in Ottawa, resumed research in early June. Carleton University is failing in its approval process. We are particularly concerned with the impacts on Early Career Researchers and graduate students whose thesis work has been interrupted for 3 months already. In the short-term, this has impacted students' sense of purpose and motivation, not to mention their mental health; in the long-term, this has the potential to impact their career trajectories. In addition, it is difficult to rationalize charging our graduate students tuition while actively preventing them from progressing with their degree requirements.

We are also concerned that some grants held require that unspent funds are returned - no extensions or exceptions. This is particularly difficult for industry sponsored projects where research agreements have specific deliverables that cannot be met. Furthermore, many of our faculty members have papers that are being delayed at the submission or revision stage because they are unable to finalize experiments. Seeing others move forward while we sit on the sidelines is frustrating and demoralizing. This will affect our ability to fund and attract future graduate students.

We also note with grave concern some of the language and requirements that are used by the University when considering return to work plans. It is also unclear who is in charge of these decisions. For example, the request to ask for daily permissions to come on campus for the personnel listed on the approved RTW plans is excessive. The argument that this is required in order to report to the government seems false - this appears to be a unique requirement at Carleton. It is not required at other Ottawa research institutions. This will, without a doubt, burden our faculty and administrative staff without improving safe operations of our research laboratories.

Carleton's failure to resume research activities is broadly known outside the University, in particular in Ottawa where most of our collaborators work. We fear that our inability to resume research in tandem with others is damaging the reputation of the University and its researchers. We are all committed to working with the University to ensure the safety of all members of our Departments. We also feel that plans are in place for the safe resumption of research and so we request immediate access to laboratories.

Thank you in advance for your understanding and help in this matter.

Sincerely (alphabetically)

Maria DeRosa, Chair - Dept. of Chemistry (incoming)

Kim Hellemans, Chair - Dept. of Neuroscience

Martin Holcik, Chair - Dept. of Health Science

Bruce McKay, Director - Inst. of Biochemistry (and incoming Biology Chair)

Owen Rowland, Chair - Dept. of Biology

Cc: Benoit-Antoine Bacon, President

Jerry Tomberlin, Provost

Rafik Goubran, Vice-President (Research and International)

Patrice Smith, Dean (FGPA)