



Notes for a Presentation to the Senate Standing Committee on Social Affairs, Science and Technology

Suzanne Fortier, President, NSERC

January 30, 2008

Opening Comments

First, I would like to thank you for inviting me to meet with you today. I am honored to have this opportunity to talk to you about NSERC and its role in the implementation of the S&T Strategy.

About NSERC

The Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council (NSERC) manages nearly \$1 billion in grants and scholarships programs for research and advanced training in post-secondary institutions. NSERC's vision is to make Canada a country of discoverers and innovators for the benefit of all Canadians. We invest in people, discovery and innovation with the aim of advancing prosperity and quality of life in Canada by supporting the creation and transfer of knowledge in the natural sciences and engineering (NSE) and by ensuring that people are trained to discover, develop and use that knowledge.

- NSERC invests in *people* by supporting 25,000 undergraduate and graduate students and postdoctoral fellows each year. These highly skilled people form the human capital necessary for Canada's competitiveness and economic growth. NSE graduates have among the lowest unemployment rates and highest salaries in the country.
- NSERC promotes *discovery* by funding more than 11,000 research professors at Canadian universities and colleges. Their discoveries advance knowledge and form the foundation of technological development by businesses as well as quality of life improvements.
- NSERC helps make *innovation* happen by encouraging 1,400 Canadian companies to invest in academic research and training. Last year, Canadian firms invested more than \$75 million in public-private research partnerships supported by NSERC. These partnerships strengthen companies' ability to adopt and adapt discoveries and new technologies leading to commercial products and mobilize university researchers to address the needs of industry.

(The above do not include the impact of the Networks of Centres of Excellence (NCEs).)



NSERC's program structure and management priorities are perfectly aligned with the S&T Strategy's goals of creating a **People Advantage**, a **Knowledge Advantage** and an **Entrepreneurial Advantage** for Canada.

NSERC and the principles of the S&T Strategy

Since the Strategy was released in May, NSERC has embraced its vision and worked proactively to carry out its agenda. The strategy's four principles have been internalized into NSERC's planning and decision-making functions. The four principles are also solidly embedded in NSERC's way of doing business. This includes a competitive, peer reviewed evaluation system to ensure world class levels of **excellence** and value for money, a blend of targeted and broad-based programs to ensure that **priority** research topics are addressed as well as a broad spectrum of science from discovery to applied research and commercialization, a suite of collaborative research programs that foster **partnerships** between industry and universities and appropriate and effective controls that are proven and recognized to ensure **accountability**.

NSERC's response to the Strategy

NSERC, with the Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR) and the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC), has been assigned an important role in *Mobilizing Science and Technology to Canada's advantage*. We are committed to achieving its goals and meeting its commitments.

In the last 8 months or so, we have focused our efforts and investments with the goals of:

- Mobilizing the science & engineering research community to focus on the priority areas of Energy and Natural Resources, the Environment, Health and Information and Communications Technology. For example, we are accelerating our support to outstanding researchers in the priority areas who have or are on the verge of making a breakthrough discovery that will have a significant impact at the world stage. We are also devoting more resources to strategic public-private partnerships that support projects and networks of researchers working together to solve problems in these areas.
- Extending international research linkages and making Canada a destination of choice for students and research. We are facilitating linkages between Canadian research networks with international initiatives allowing Canada to be connected at a global level. We are also creating opportunities to attract the best foreign graduate students and postdoctoral fellows working in the priority areas to come to Canada to complete their training.



- Advancing research in emerging technologies in areas of Canadian strength. We are funding new researchers, enhanced training opportunities and international linkages in key technology areas such as nanotechnology and quantum computing.
- Translating knowledge and technology into practical applications to improve the wealth, wellness and well-being of Canadians through integration. It is well recognized that the best way to flow ideas and knowledge from universities to industry and ensure that these are turned into a competitive advantage in the marketplace is through people.

We have worked closely with our sister agencies to maximize the impact of Canada's investment in S&T. We have worked diligently and moved swiftly to implement the new programs introduced in the Strategy.

Jean-Claude Gavrel will talk to you tomorrow about the Centres of Excellence in Commercialization and Research, Business-led Networks of Centres of Excellence and Industrial Research and Development Internships. These programs are managed by a joint Secretariat of the three granting agencies (CIHR, NSERC and SSHRC). These new initiatives, announced in Budget 2007, foster public-private research and commercialization partnerships.

It is important to point out that the new programs and additional funding have been enthusiastically received by the research community. Canada has an extremely vibrant capacity for public-sector research, which offers a strong potential to boost private-sector R&D through leveraged funding in partnership programs with universities.

With regard to the specific question to NSERC regarding funding

Budget 2007 has put in place instruments and investments that have allowed a rapid implementation of the Strategy. This has served as a very powerful tool to help us mobilize the research community towards advancing the goals of the Strategy.

We welcome the commitment made by the government in the S&T Strategy to maintain Canada's G-7 leadership in public sector R&D performance and to continue to support excellence in research and the development of talent.