

COMMONWEALTH EDUCATION BRIEFING NOTES

Prepared by the Commonwealth Consortium for Education

A grouping of voluntary and professional bodies committed to education development in the Commonwealth

No. 3. THE COMMONWEALTH SCHOLARSHIP & FELLOWSHIP PLAN

Executive Summary

The Commonwealth Scholarship and Fellowship Plan (CSFP) has proved to be one of the most enduring and successful forms of Commonwealth collaboration. Some 25,000 individuals have benefited from awards. Scholars have come from every Commonwealth country, whilst awards have been held in twenty-three countries (Box 1). At their meeting in Cape Town, Ministers will learn that activity has increased significantly in recent years, and will consider proposals to expand further in the run up to the Plan's fiftieth anniversary in 2009.

What is the CSFP?

The Plan provides a framework through which governments in Commonwealth countries can offer educational awards to citizens of other member states. It is entirely up to each individual country how many awards it will contribute (if any), and to which countries they will be offered. There is no central administration. In practice the majority of awards are for conventional postgraduate study, but this is not a requirement. Other forms of award currently offered include undergraduate awards, split-site doctorates, short-term fellowships (typically for mid-career professionals) and scholarships by distance learning.

The Plan was established at the first Commonwealth Education Conference at Oxford in 1959. It aimed to provide a practical manifestation of Commonwealth collaboration, by enabling citizens to share the wide range of educational resources and experiences throughout member countries. Five general principles were established to govern the Plan, as follows:

- the CSFP should be distinct and additional to any other schemes;
- the Plan should be based on mutual co-operation and the sharing of educational experience among all Commonwealth countries;
- the nature of awards should be flexible, to take account of changing needs over time;
- the Plan should be Commonwealth-wide, and based on a series of bilateral arrangements between sending and host countries;
- awards should recognise and promote the highest standards of intellectual achievement.

Historical Context

Reports presented to successive Education Ministers' Conferences record trends in the development of the Plan. Numbers grew rapidly during the first few years of operation, and a revised target of 1,000 individual award-holders at any one time was met in 1967. That year also saw the highest number of countries hosting awards at

Box 1: 53 Member States of the Commonwealth

Antigua/Barbuda	Ca	1981	Mozambique	Af	1995
Australia*	Pa	1931	Namibia	Af	1990
Bahamas	Ca	1973	Nauru	Pa	1968
Bangladesh	As	1972	New Zealand*	Pa	1931
Barbados	Ca	1966	Nigeria*	Af	1960
Belize	Ca	1981	Pakistan*	As	1947
Botswana*	Af	1966	Papua New Guinea	Pa	1975
Brunei Darussalam*	As	1984	St. Kitts Nevis	Ca	1983
Cameroon	Af	1995	St Lucia	Ca	1979
Canada*	Ca	1931	St Vincent	Ca	1979
Cyprus*	Eu	1961	Samoa	Pa	1970
Dominica	Ca	1978	Seychelles	Af	1976
Fiji	Pa	1970	Sierra Leone*	Af	1961
Gambia	Af	1965	Singapore	As	1965
Ghana*	Af	1957	Solomon Is	Pa	1978
Grenada	Ca	1974	South Africa*	Af	1931
Guyana	Ca	1966	Sri Lanka*	As	1948
India*	As	1947	Swaziland	Af	1968
Jamaica*	Ca	1962	Tanzania*	Af	1961
Kenya	Af	1963	Tonga	Pa	1970
Kiribati	Pa	1979	Trinidad/Tobago*	Ca	1962
Lesotho	Af	1966	Tuvalu	Pa	1978
Malawi	Af	1964	Uganda*	Af	1962
Maldives	As	1982	United Kingdom*	Eu	-
Malaysia*	As	1957	Vanuatu	Pa	1980
Malta*	Eu	1964	Zambia	Af	1964
Mauritius*	Af	1968			

Af – Africa (18) **As** – Asia (8) **Eu** – Europe (3)

Pa – Pacific (11) **Ca** – Canada/Caribbean (13)

* Denotes the 21 countries that have hosted Commonwealth Scholars. In addition Hong Kong, before rejoining China, and the University of East Africa also provided awards.

any one time – 14. Although some developing countries expressed frustration that their offers did not attract the numbers of applicants hoped for, this period saw the establishment of a tradition whereby students from developed Commonwealth countries undertook postgraduate work in developing-country institutions.

Growth slowed during the 1970s, as the number of individuals on award each year settled at around 1,000. However the early part of the next decade saw further expansion, partly as a way of alleviating the effects of the introduction of full-cost tuition fees for postgraduate study in some countries. More Commonwealth Scholarships were included in the 'Pym Package' of support for overseas students in the United Kingdom, whilst Canada also pledged increased support. A new and ambitious target level of 1,500 awards each year was set by Education Ministers at their Cyprus Conference in 1984 (9CCEM), and achieved in 1986. 1993 saw the Plan reach an all-time high in terms of numbers – with 1,704 Scholars and 105 Fellows holding awards.

Table 1 New Awards 2003-2006

Year	Australia	Botswana	Brunei	Canada	Ghana	India	Jamaica	Malaysia	Malta	Mauritius	New Zealand	South Africa	Trin & Tob	UK	Total
2003-2004			6	61		22		10		1	7		3	573	683
2004-2005	4		5	73	1	26		10			14	1	2	570	706
2005-2006	3	2		56		32	1	11	1		36			502	644
Total	7	2	11	190	1	80	1	31	1	1	57	1	5	1,645	2,033

Table 2 Scholars and Fellows on Award 2003-2006

Year	Australia	Botswana	Brunei	Canada	Ghana	India	Jamaica	Malaysia	Malta	Mauritius	New Zealand	South Africa	Trin & Tob	UK	Total
2003-2004	3	0	7	194	0	53	0	10	0	1	49	0	4	924	1,245
2004-2005	4	0	5	212	1	71	0	20	0	1	47	1	6	1,087	1,455
2005-2006	3	2	0	201	0	83	1	24	1	1	70	0	2	1,172	1,560
Total	10	2	12	607		207	1	54	1	3	166	1	12	3,183	4,260

This next six years, however, were a period of rapid decline. This partly reflected the withdrawal of several countries as donors, and partly a lack of confidence globally in the impact of scholarships and higher education as a tool for international development. By the time of 14CCEM in 2000, the numbers of new awards and students on award had slipped back to 450 and 1,021 respectively. Ministers agreed a set of proposals to reverse this trend. They included

- a revised target for the number of new awards, and a doubling of the number of countries offering them;
- much stronger analysis of past award-holders' achievements, through tracer studies;
- increased co-operation between participating countries, through e.g. the establishment of an international web site, bringing information about the full range of CSFP opportunities together for the first time.

A report to the Edinburgh CCEM in 2003 showed that these proposals were having an impact. The average number of new awards per year had increased from 412 to 460: there was an increase in the number of countries offering awards and some evidence of increased diversity in the types of awards on offer.

Current Situation

Each of these trends has been continued in the three years to 2006. A survey conducted on behalf of the Commonwealth Secretariat for presentation at 16CCEM shows that activity under the Plan is approaching the highest level in its history. Particular features include the following:

- The average number of new awards per year has increased to 677. This represents a 47% increase on the 460 reported in Edinburgh, and 57% more than the figure for the three years covered in the 2000 report.
- The total number of Scholars and Fellows on award increased to 1,560 by 2005-06, the eighth highest figure in the Plan's history, following four consecutive annual increases.
- The number of countries where awards are held has increased from nine in the previous report to fourteen. New destinations include countries which have not previously hosted awards, or have

not done so for several years, such as Botswana, Ghana, Malta and Mauritius.

- Whilst the strong emphasis on postgraduate training has continued, there has been an increasing trend within that towards Masters level. The proportion of award holders studying at this level has reached 59% - the highest ever figure. Doctorates remain an important element in provision, and appear to have stabilised at around 30%.
- The proportion of awards going to Africa has increased significantly. Having risen from 32% to 36% in the four years to 2003, the proportion accelerated rapidly in the three years covered by the last report, and now exceeds 50% for the first time ever. This does not appear to be at the expense of South Asia, whose proportion of awards has remained stable at about 26%. Instead, it marks a decline in the relative proportion awarded to Australia, Britain, Canada and New Zealand, the Caribbean and East Asia. The changing percentage shares should, however, be seen in the context of the increasing number of awards overall.
- Award-holders are generally getting older, reversing the trend reported in 2003. In the 2005 survey, all three age-categories over the age of 35 registered an increase, and the total in this age group was almost 32%, compared with 21% three years earlier. The proportion under the age of 25, by contrast, declined from 19% to 14%.
- Whilst all subjects of study remain eligible, some shift is evident towards topics that relate directly to development objectives, such as health and education. About 30% of awards are in the field of science and technology, and this proportion attracted favourable comment from the UK House of Commons Select Committee on Science and Technology in 2004. Only 6% list their subject of study as being arts.
- The proportion of female Scholars, which has risen steadily in recent years, remains stubbornly below 50% - averaging 44% in the years under report. When Fellows are included in the calculation, the figure reduces to 42%. Among Fellows, however, there has been some increase in female participation.

- There is, however, evidence that female applicants do proportionately better in the selection process. Those countries that break down their full applicants' profile report that only 28% of applications received are from females, compared with the 44% ultimately selected.
- Reports from agencies suggested interest in the Plan remained high, and was increasing along with the expansion of higher education in their countries. Ghana, for example, reported a 75% increase in the number of applications received.
- The United Kingdom remains the largest contributor of awards, contributing 74% of all awards recorded in the report, compared with 63% three years earlier. In part, this reflects the commitment made at the start of the Plan to be the largest contributor, and host at least half of the total awards. The figure also reflects the shift within the UK to shorter and distance-learning awards, both of which are cheaper and therefore allow more awards to be made. It should be recognised that, although the *proportion* of awards held in the UK increased during the period, the *number* of awards outside the UK also increased, and is at the highest level for five years. Several other countries are known to be considering new awards.

Relevance and Diversity

A significant outcome of the 2000 Education Ministers' Conference (14CCEM) was the proposal that donor countries review the type of award offered in future, with a view to increasing diversity and access. Early indications of this were the decision of Canada to offer scholarships by distance learning to Caribbean countries, and of the UK to support split-site doctorates. In 2002-03, the UK took this process further by introducing mid-career professional fellowships, and adopting the idea of distance-learning scholarships.

By the time of the 2006 Report, these initiatives were beginning to have a significant impact. Over a third of current UK award-holders now study by distance learning, and the majority of these never visit their 'host' country as part of their study-course. The professional fellowships programme is smaller, but has doubled from the initial intake of thirty in 2003. Taken together, these innovations have been influential in the increased orientation of the scheme to Africa, and to the rising average age of award holders referred to above.

The CSFP authorities in the UK are currently reviewing the effectiveness of these initiatives, and it will be some years before final conclusions are reached. The initial indications, however, are positive. The distance-learning scholarships, which achieved their first graduates in 2005, report drop-out rates of less than 10%. This is only slightly higher than for 'conventional' masters degrees, which cost twice or thrice as much. The time taken to obtain the award is longer, but this is partly compensated for by the ability to apply newly acquired skills even before graduation. Professional fellowships, which have involved a wide range of public, voluntary and private sector organisations as hosts, are thought to provide a direct and cost-effective way of transferring skills, and in

some cases they act as a catalyst for new and long-term partnerships.

Alumni and Long-Term Impact

In common with many other international scholarship programmes, the CSFP made little attempt to assess the impact of its awards during the first decades of its operation. With the exception of one international survey in the late 1980s, little attempt was made to trace former award-holders; still less to evaluate their contribution or harness the expertise and goodwill generated.

Much has changed in recent years. In 2003, joint activity by the Canadian and UK authorities led to the publication of the first *Directory of Commonwealth Scholars and Fellows*, giving career profiles of almost 2,000 former award holders, and listing the names of almost 20,000. In response, the 15CCEM in Edinburgh set a target of establishing a database containing at least 5,000 former award holders by the end of 2006; this looks likely to be met, with several countries now maintaining their own registers.

Analysis of this data needs to be developed further, but some trends are clear. The proportion of award-holders returning to work in their home countries is thought to be higher than for overseas students generally; over four-fifths in the UK and comfortably over two-thirds in Canada. It is likely that these proportions will increase further following the introduction of distance-learning and short-term professional awards. A high proportion works in the public sector, with higher education the largest single occupation.

Now that significant numbers are being traced, utilisation of this resource presents a significant opportunity for the Commonwealth. In addition to a regular hard-copy magazine, electronic networks are being developed for alumni with common professional interests. The first five cover education, public health, governance, environment and agriculture. Discussions are currently taking place with the Commonwealth Foundation to identify ways in which this resource can be better integrated into other Commonwealth initiatives

Administration of the CSFP

As mentioned above, there is no central management of the CSFP. Instead, each country appoints its own *nominating agency*. This is normally, but not always, an arm of government. The agency is responsible, where invited, for nominating candidates to other countries. It is also responsible for issuing the offers of any awards tenable in its own country

The process described has several advantages. It represents a genuine partnership. The fact that candidates go through two selections helps ensure quality, and minimises the risk of corruption. The involvement of recipient-country governments should ensure that nominations reflect any national priorities. The country that offers the award does not have to bear the costs of advertising.

However the system also has drawbacks. The process can lack co-ordination, and be difficult for candidates to

understand. The complexity of the two-stage selection system might put off states that were thinking of offering a small number of awards. In some countries, it could result in selection procedures that lack transparency, with candidates' applications all being filtered by the authorities. Overall Plan progress is also difficult to monitor – particularly in the absence of a central agency charged with this task on a regular basis.

Three recommendations from Education Ministers in recent years relate to these areas. One was for the

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reintroduction of occasional meetings between host countries, to discuss both the general principles of the Plan and administrative issues. The first such meeting was convened in London in July 2001, and a follow-up was scheduled for Stellenbosch in South Africa, immediately preceding 16CCEM. Second, 14CCEM in Halifax agreed to a proposal to develop the first international CSFP web site, bringing together activity in all host countries. This was implemented by 2002, and the site can be found at www.csfp-online.org. In practice, some countries have been able to update their materials more frequently than others, but the site does give a useful overview of the current position. The final recommendation, for more collaboration over alumni activity, was partly met with the publication of the alumni directory. Creation of a small central unit – based at the Commonwealth Secretariat or elsewhere – to provide central facilitation awaits decision: the matter was expected to be addressed in recommendations to 16CCEM.

Prospects and Recommendations

As Education Ministers prepare to meet in Cape Town, the climate for expanding the CSFP is possibly as favourable as at any time in its history, for several reasons. First, the expansion of recent years provides a useful platform for further development. Second, recent years have seen increased confidence by donors in higher education and scholarships as a form of development. Third, the willingness to experiment with new forms of award following the recommendations of the 2000 CCEM has opened up new opportunities for the Plan. Fourth, the approaching 50th Anniversary of the Plan in 2009 will focus attention on its achievements to date and potential for the future.

Initial indications are promising. In September 2006, the United Kingdom announced a significant expansion of its Commonwealth Scholarships by distance learning, with a further 200 awards to be created in the areas of education

and health during 2007. At least two other countries were known to be considering offering scholarships for the first time. Together with the expansion of recent years, these developments open up the possibility that the anniversary year could see the highest number of Commonwealth Scholarships and Fellowships ever, with the number possibly reaching 2000 for the first time.

Against this background, Ministers in Cape Town are likely to consider action in the following areas:

- further efforts to establish a small central facility to assist national agencies with the promotion and management of the Plan
- review by member governments of their contributions to the Plan, with a view to raising the number of award-holders to 2,000 for the first time by 2009, and maintaining that figure in 2010;
- the possible creation of a central fund, as a one-off legacy of the Anniversary year, to support new Commonwealth Scholarships in developing countries on a shared-cost basis;
- work by national agencies, together with relevant bodies such as the Commonwealth Foundation, to enhance collaboration over alumni activity, tracer studies and impact assessment;
- extension of the programme of alumni networks, successfully piloted in the UK, to include alumni from all participating states;
- staging of a programme of events to mark the anniversary of the Plan in 2009, on a theme related to the impact of scholarships or higher education on development;
- delegation of the implementation of the recommendations to a committee comprising a balance of developed-country and developing-country governments.

These proposals represent an ambitious agenda, the fulfilment of which will require both central commitment and support from individual member states. The achievements of the Plan in the past six years, however, suggest that if these are forthcoming, the proposals can be realised. If so, then the future CSFP will be confirmed as not only one of the largest and most enduring forms of Commonwealth collaboration, but also one of the most prestigious schemes of its kind in the world.

More information

Secretary, Commonwealth Consortium for Education
7 Lion Yard, Tremadoc Road, London SW4 7NQ
Consortium website: www.commonwealtheducation.org
or CCEM website: www.16CCEM.com

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