

Evaluating Commonwealth Scholarships in the United Kingdom:

Assessing impact in the Caribbean



Executive summary

Higher education is a vital contributor to socioeconomic development and growth; international scholarships play an important role in this. The Commonwealth Scholarship Commission in the UK (CSC), a major international scholarship agency funded by the UK government and responsible for disbursing 18,000 scholarships to date, is currently engaged in wide-scale evaluation of the impact of its awards. Almost 1,200 of the 18,000 scholarships awarded have gone to individuals from the Caribbean, and the aim of this report is to assess the impact of these awards, particularly in the light of regional priority issues.

As part of the CSC evaluation programme, a detailed survey of over 2,000 alumni from around the Commonwealth was recently conducted, and the preliminary findings were published in the report *Evaluating Commonwealth Scholarships in the United Kingdom: Assessing impact in key priority areas*. This report follows on to present the first regionally-focused analysis, in which we aim to assess impact in the Caribbean in terms of both global development challenges and regional issues.

Our overview of development issues in the Caribbean highlights a need for skills and expertise to increase productivity and diversify economic activity, improve infrastructure, improve disaster preparedness, tackle climate change, address high levels of crime and social inequality, and increase regional cooperation. These in turn can be related to three major global development challenges to produce green economic growth, sustain development gains, and increase stability and international cooperation.

The main findings of the report are that:

We are providing relevant skills and expertise to make an impact on these issues

- Over 99% of survey respondents from the Caribbean reported that they had gained knowledge and skills through their awards. 94% told us that the awards had given them access to equipment and expertise not available in their home countries.
- Awards given to citizens of Caribbean countries have increased from an average of 17 per year in the 1960s to an average of 27 per year in the 2000s (34 in 2009). There is good participation across the different countries of the Caribbean, and good take-up of new schemes. Award holders have studied subjects of particular relevance to regional issues.

These skills are being put into use in the region

- The majority of our alumni are working in their home countries, in professional and managerial roles in higher education and other sectors relevant to the needs of the Caribbean. Of 240 Caribbean alumni for whom we have up-to-date employment details, 75% are working in their home countries, with a further 12% working within the wider Caribbean region.
- 86% of Caribbean survey respondents reported advancement in their careers as a result of their award. 95% reported that they use skills and knowledge gained on award in their employment, and 88% believe that they have been able to introduce new practices or innovations into their organisation as a result of these.

Our alumni are having an impact in key areas

- There is extensive engagement in the 12 key priority areas for development and leadership, which can be grouped under the high-level development challenges of promoting green economic growth, building and sustaining the region's future, and increasing stability, good governance and regional cooperation.
- 89% of respondents reported impact in one or more priority area.
- Over half of the respondents from the Caribbean reported having influenced government thinking in one or more of the priority areas (51%, as opposed to 45% of all respondents) while 77% reported involvement in projects, and 47% reported having a wider socioeconomic impact (81% and 48% for all survey respondents).
- The top five areas where Caribbean respondents reported impact were Quantity and Quality of Education, Science and Research Applications, Health, Environment Protection, and Governance.
- Case study evidence shows impact in more detail and the part played in this by our awards. 11 case studies are presented in the report, demonstrating both long-term and immediate impact from alumni who held awards in the 1960s through to those who completed their awards in the last five years.
- The breadth of impact is also illustrated; case study examples include micro-financing to encourage entrepreneurship across the Caribbean; the development of GPS navigation in Jamaica; training the first gastroenterologist in Guyana; education on climate change in Trinidad and Tobago; modernisation of banana growing in St Lucia; and development of aquaculture in Jamaica.
- Other activities which are particularly relevant to the region include a high degree of participation in regional and international organisations, as well as work in the areas of governance and law.
- There is considerable crossover between impacts. This was particularly positive, for example, in terms of Environment Protection, with those reporting impact in this area also doing so in other fields, such as Agricultural/Rural Productivity, Physical Infrastructure, and Quantity and Quality of Education.

The report concludes that the CSC's alumni in the Caribbean are having considerable impact in key areas relating to regional and global development challenges. The CSC is providing relevant skills and expertise, and the survey respondents demonstrate how they are putting these into use in key areas such as increasing agricultural productivity, encouraging entrepreneurship, tackling climate change, addressing crime, and increasing regional cooperation – areas that link strongly to the objectives of our key stakeholders, the Department for International Development (DFID), the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO), and the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS). The next stage for the CSC is to further quantify and verify the nature of this impact, with regards to particular sectors and programmes, and to ensure that the evaluation process is ongoing, allowing for continuous review and improvement of its programmes, so that these can continue to have a positive impact for years to come.