



# **Evaluating Commonwealth Scholarships in the United Kingdom:**

## **Assessing impact in key priority areas**

Executive summary



The **Commonwealth Scholarship Commission in the United Kingdom** (CSC) is responsible for managing Britain's contribution to the Commonwealth Scholarship and Fellowship Plan (CSFP), established in 1959. The five core principles stated at its foundation remain a feature of the CSFP today, and provide a valuable framework for the CSC's work. The Plan would, it was agreed:

- be distinct and additional to any other schemes
- be based on mutual cooperation and the sharing of educational experience among all Commonwealth countries
- be flexible, to take account of changing needs over time
- be Commonwealth-wide, and based on a series of bilateral arrangements between home and host countries
- recognise and promote the highest level of intellectual achievement

Since 1960, the Commonwealth Scholarship Commission in the United Kingdom has offered the following awards:

**Commonwealth Scholarships:** 'general' Scholarships available for postgraduate, and in some cases undergraduate, study at any UK university.

**Commonwealth Academic Staff Scholarships:** targeted at academic staff in specific developing country universities. These awards were merged with 'general' Scholarships in 2006.

**Commonwealth Academic Fellowships:** aimed at mid-career staff in specific developing country universities and providing for up to six months' work at a UK institution.

**Commonwealth Split-site Scholarships:** to support candidates undertaking doctoral study at a university in their home country to spend time in the UK as part of their academic work.

**Commonwealth Professional Fellowships:** offering mid-career professionals from developing Commonwealth countries an opportunity to spend a period with a UK host organisation, working in a relevant field.

**Commonwealth Distance Learning Scholarships:** allowing developing country students to secure Master's-level qualifications from UK institutions through distance learning study.

**Commonwealth Medical Scholarships:** from the same pool, and offered on the same terms, as 'general' Scholarships, to candidates with basic medical or dental qualifications, to enable them to pursue a higher professional qualification or advanced clinical training. These awards were merged with 'general' Scholarships in 1996.

**Commonwealth Medical Fellowships:** nominated through national agencies or medical schools, for up to twelve months' clinical and/or research experience at an advanced level in the candidate's field of specialisation. These awards were merged with Academic Fellowships in 1996.

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This summary is based on the executive summary of *Evaluating Commonwealth Scholarships in the United Kingdom: Assessing impact in key priority areas*, and has been extended to include case studies from the report. The full report, authored by Rachel Day and Julie Stackhouse (of the CSC secretariat) and Dr Norman Geddes (Commonwealth Scholarship Commissioner) and published in June 2009, is available at **[www.cscuk.org.uk/cscevaluationandmonitoringprogramme.asp](http://www.cscuk.org.uk/cscevaluationandmonitoringprogramme.asp)**

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## Introduction

Higher education is a vital contributor to socioeconomic development and growth; international scholarships play an important role in this. The Commonwealth Scholarship Commission (CSC) in the UK, a major international scholarship agency with an annual budget of some £18 million provided by the UK government, is currently undertaking a wide-ranging evaluation of the impact of its awards. This report summarises the key findings of this initiative to date, provides information on what former Scholars and Fellows have done since their return to their home countries, and assesses the impact of the awards in key priority areas over the past 50 years.

Its main findings to date about respondents are that:

- 88% had returned home and are currently living in their home countries
- Over 99% claimed that they gained knowledge in their field of expertise
- 90% reported activity in at least one of 12 key priority areas for development and leadership
- The top four areas in which alumni reported activity are Scientific and Research Applications, Quantity and Quality of Education, Governance, and Health
- Respondents from sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia reported the highest levels of impact in key development priority areas
- 92% reported that their award had helped them obtain advancement in their career

## Background

The Commonwealth Scholarship and Fellowship Plan (CSFP) was established in 1959, based on the principles of mutual cooperation and sharing of educational experience. Since then, 26,000 individuals from all around the Commonwealth have held awards in over 20 host countries. Awards have mainly been scholarships for postgraduate study and fellowships at postdoctoral level. The UK has been the largest contributor to the CSFP to date, and has hosted around 16,000 awards through the CSC, funded by the UK government.

At the time of its establishment, the focus of the Plan was on supporting individuals, and awards were to 'recognise and promote the highest level of intellectual achievement'. Since then, international development objectives have come very much to the forefront and have become a major focus for the scheme, along with other objectives, such as maintaining the international profile of their institutions, promoting international collaboration, and identifying future leaders.

In the UK, since the late 1990s in particular, CSC policy has emphasised both development impact, largely in relation to the Millennium Development Goals, and leadership, as well as international collaboration and partnerships, and aims to ensure the relevance of its awards to Scholars' home countries. Applicants for awards funded by DFID, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) and the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) are expected to demonstrate not only academic merit and high-quality study proposals, but also the likely impact of their work on their home countries. The CSC has introduced a much wider range of awards and its additional activities, such as the establishment of an alumni association and a series of professional networks, seek to make the most of the Commonwealth-wide nature of the Plan, by encouraging international collaboration and networking.



**Professor Helen Kimbi** was nominated by the University of Buea, Cameroon, for a Commonwealth Academic Fellowship in 2002. A member of the Department of Plant and Animal Sciences in the Faculty of Science, Professor Kimbi's Fellowship, studying Medical Parasitology (Malaria), was hosted by the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine.

*'I have been working on malaria and its co-infections with helminths (another common parasitic infection) as well as malaria in HIV patients. In the course of these studies, many of our patients have benefited from free diagnosis and treatment of these diseases. These activities have led to better health and poverty reduction, especially in rural areas. I have been able to educate villagers on the proper use of drugs in order to avoid drug resistance. Proper environmental management, in order to avoid the transmission of many tropical diseases, has also been carried out in the course of our studies.'*



**Professor Omkar Wakhlu** was part of our first-ever cohort of Commonwealth Scholars, holding a Commonwealth Scholarship from 1960-1963. He obtained his DPhil in Fluid Mechanics from the University of Birmingham. Professor Wakhlu's work is in the field of promoting quality in engineering education and the development of research facilities in water resource engineering. He is currently working in the areas of water resources engineering, sustainable development, and leadership and quality in education. During his academic career, he has had the opportunity to influence and teach many at the beginning of their careers. As he himself estimates, 'Approximately 2,000 engineers have graduated after training during my active academic term of 12 years. Many of them work as chief engineers in India and other countries'. He has also conducted several management development programmes in both private and public sector organisations, and is actively engaged as a postgraduate research examiner.

## Aims and objectives

The CSC's evaluation programme aims to provide a wide-ranging and detailed analysis to measure the impact of award holders against the objectives of the CSC and its funding bodies, to improve our understanding of how international scholarships can contribute to social and economic development, and to demonstrate the benefits of the scheme to those parties who fund it and the wider key stakeholder community. This knowledge is essential for strategic policymaking, and for determining the future priorities of the Commission. We are also eager to make this information more widely available so as to influence global decision making with respect to international scholarships.

The survey that provides the evidence for this report sought to investigate the impact of our awards at three levels – on individual respondents, on the institutions where they work, and on wider society. In each case, the intention was to examine not only the overall level of achievement and impact, but also the extent to which the award had contributed to this.

## Sample and methodology

We have been able to trace 6,000 of the CSC's 16,000 former award holders, and around 40% of these took part in the survey. The sample was broadly representative in terms of gender, programme of study, and country of origin. Findings are also broadly consistent with what we know of the broader alumni group with whom we are in contact, in areas such as geographical location and sector of employment. One aspect where the data is skewed is that, due largely to the logistics of tracing and new methods of maintaining contact, award holders from more recent years make up a large proportion of responses. Since it is likely that older award holders will have reached more senior positions than younger ones, this may serve to underestimate impact.

The survey asked respondents to provide factual data on their career history, public offices held, and awards and honours received, plus their views on how they felt the award had benefited them, their institutions and their society, with detailed examples. Specifically, respondents were asked about their involvement in 12 key development priority areas, and asked to give details of specific roles, projects and activities.

Responses are analysed according to major variables such as economic sector, subject area, respondents' region, and length of time since award.

### CSC development and leadership priorities

- Health
- Agricultural/Rural Productivity
- Quantity and Quality of Education
- Governance
- International Relations
- Poverty Reduction
- Social Inequalities and Human Rights
- Physical Infrastructure
- Environment Protection
- Conflict Resolution/Humanitarian Assistance
- Scientific and Research Applications
- Job Creation

## Key findings

The results of the survey provide a convincing argument that the awards are having a positive effect and are meeting their objectives. Comprehensive findings are available in the full report.

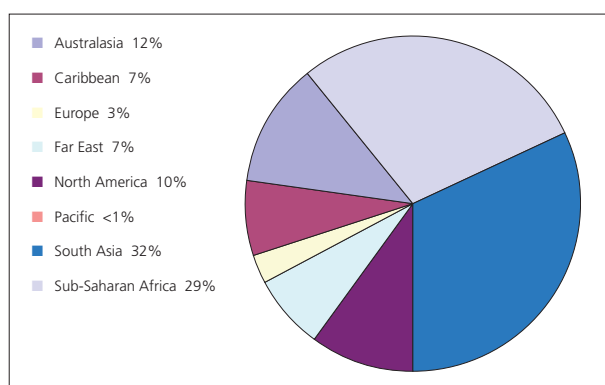
The results provide both quantitative and qualitative data. As well as biographical details, the former includes award holders' reports of their activities and what they feel that they have gained from the award, and the benefits that have accrued to them as individuals, their institutions and their societies. The highlights below provide an impressive figure of our alumni as actively engaged in their societies and able to use the skills learned on award to have an impact, specifically in key priority areas.

The qualitative data has provided us with a wealth of information to add to the above, with 1,400 respondents choosing to give concrete examples of how they feel that they have had an impact. A small selection (38) of these has been provided throughout the full report, ranging in fields of interest and activities: from transferring technology to farmers in Bangladesh to produce high-quality seed potato tubers, to managing agricultural trade negotiations between the EU and ACP states; from educating villages on the proper use of drugs to combat parasitic infections in Cameroon, to the establishment of a DNA database in Jamaica; from constructing classrooms in Sudan, to the establishment of an aquaculture unit at the University of the West Indies; from building infrastructure in Uganda, to increasing transparency in the global extractive industries.

The full report begins by describing characteristics of our alumni as a whole and of the survey respondents, before moving on to look specifically at impacts and analysing results under each of the 12 priority areas. Some of the key findings to date can be summarised as follows.

### Who are we talking about?

- Survey respondents were most likely to have held their awards in the last two decades. 71% took up their awards from 1990 onwards.
- Similar to our alumni population, 61% of respondents are from sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia, although 55 countries are represented in total.
- 32% of the 2,226 respondents are female, reflecting our alumni population as a whole. The proportion of women taking up awards has risen from around 10% in the 1960s to over 40% in recent years.
- 60% of respondents studied science subjects, although a broad range of subject areas was represented. This is again reflective of the population as a whole. Most were studying for postgraduate qualifications based in the UK.



Survey respondents by region



### Dr Judith Henry-Mowatt's

Commonwealth Scholarship, awarded in 1998, funded her PhD studies in Toxicology at the University of Manchester. She is now Director of the Forensic Science Laboratory at the Department of National Security in her home country of Jamaica. She has been actively involved in drafting the terms and conditions for the operation of Jamaica's first sexual offenders' register, and has written the proposal and submitted the relevant arguments for the establishment of a national DNA database. She has also been instrumental in the reorganisation and restructuring of the island's Rape Units. Internationally, she is Jamaica's forensic representative to Inter-pol and one of the country's representatives on the Caribbean DNA working group.

In addition, Dr Henry-Mowatt is also actively involved in training scientists of the future. As well as contributing to the development of a new occupational and environmental health and safety Master's course at the University of the West Indies, she also teaches the toxicology module on a part-time basis. With Jamaica soon to pass its first law regarding occupational health and safety, these new graduates will be well placed to meet the need for trained occupational health and safety inspectors.



**Dr Buba Ibrahim Ahmed** is a senior lecturer in crop production at the Abubakar Tafawa Balewa University (ATBU) in Nigeria. He held a Commonwealth Academic Fellowship at Swansea University in 2006, and with his Swansea counterpart was awarded a DelpHE grant in 2007 for collaborative research work.

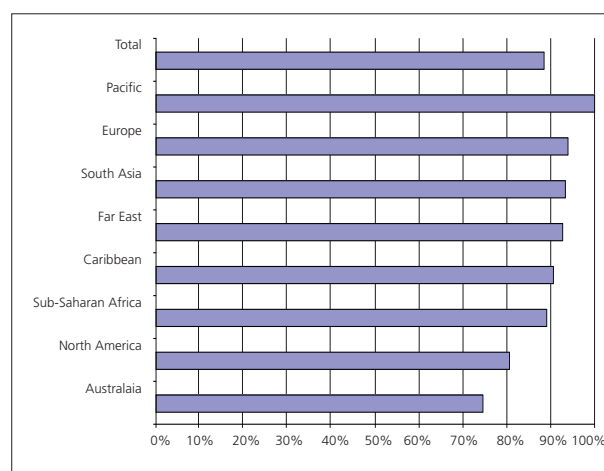
On his return home following his Fellowship, Dr Ahmed was appointed as a member of ATBU's research and development committee, as well as being asked to oversee the affairs of the Directorate of Endowment as Director. He feels that he was able to bring positive changes and benefits to the university in both positions, not least securing over NGN 240 million in funding.

He also served as a committee member for the establishment of a teaching hospital in Bauchi State, and was able to influence government thinking and policy in areas of health, education and poverty reduction.

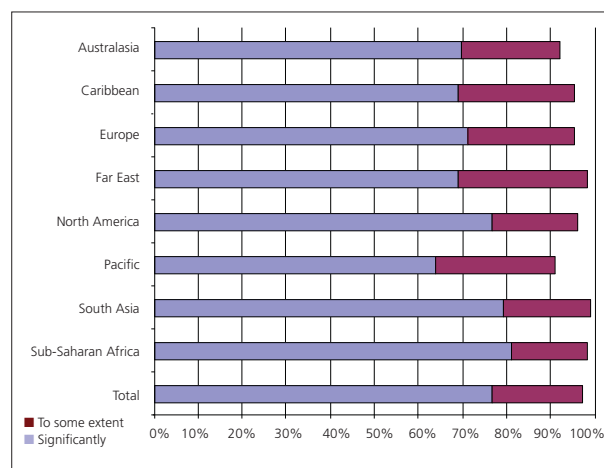
The DelpHE project, of which he is lead partner and coordinator, involves developing an environmentally-friendly alternative to chemical pesticides for the control of major arthropod pests of crops in Nigeria, and is linked to the seventh Millennium Development Goal, to ensure environmental sustainability.

### Impact on individuals

- Over 99% of respondents claimed that they gained knowledge in their field of expertise, 98% increased their analytical and technical skills, and 82% learned techniques for managing people and projects. Furthermore, 93% reported that they accessed equipment and expertise not available in their home country.
- 92% reported that their award had helped them obtain advancement in their career.
- 66% rated their economic circumstances as within the top 20% of their countries.
- In addition to paid employment, 25% held an elected or nominated public office, and



### Respondents based in their home countries, by region



### 'I use the specific skills and knowledge gained on award in my work', by region

51% reported involvement in charitable and other NGO activities.

- The scheme facilitates international collaboration and cooperation, particularly with regards to university and research partnerships. 92% reported maintaining links with contacts or institutions in the UK to at least some extent. 71% reported maintaining links with universities in the UK, again to at least some extent.

### Impact on institutions

- 93% reported that their award had to some extent increased their ability to have influence and make changes at work.
- 97% were able to utilise the skills gained during their award in their work and, for the most part, were doing so having returned to their home countries.
- 88% of respondents have returned home and are currently based in their home countries.



## Impact on society

- 90% reported activity in at least one of the 12 key priority areas for development and leadership, which in part reflect the priorities of the scheme's funding bodies.
- Of the 90%, 70% provided additional details describing this involvement. The 36 case studies throughout the full report provide a flavour of this impact (as described above), which will be expanded upon and analysed further in phase 3 of the evaluation programme.
- In terms of type of impact, 45% of our respondents reported having influence on government thinking, 48% having a socioeconomic impact, and 81% involvement in a specific project, in at least one of the 12 priority areas.
- The top areas, in order of reported activity, were Scientific and Research Applications, Quantity and Quality of Education, Governance, Health, Environment Protection, and Poverty Reduction.
- Significant numbers also reported involvement in the areas of Social Inequalities and Human Rights, Job Creation, Agricultural/Rural Productivity, International Relations, Physical Infrastructure, and Conflict Resolution/Humanitarian Assistance.
- Impacts were spread widely across priority areas, with many respondents indicating more than one, and were not confined to an individual's subject background or employment sector. For example, while a large proportion of respondents were employed in the HE sector, they reported impact in a range of priority areas.
- In addition, we can assume that many of those employed in the HE sector are transferring knowledge widely; for example, one case study alumnus estimates that 2,000 chief engineers in India have graduated from his course during his career.

## Trends

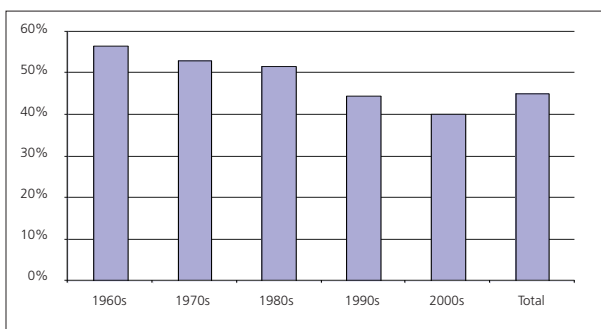
- Respondents from sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia reported the highest levels of impact in key development priority areas.
- Time elapsed since the award was held had a small influence on both the nature and sector of impact. While newer award holders were more likely to report impact in Poverty Reduction and Environment Protection, older ones were more likely to report activities in Job Creation. Although we would expect much of our impact to be long term, many of our recent alumni are also reporting almost immediate impact on completion of their awards.
- Awards do not always need to be given in specific subjects for alumni to have an impact in that area, and this relationship varies according to the priority area.
- While type of impact may vary to some extent with programme of study – for example, whether the award had contributed to an individual's career or helped them to influence government thinking – all programmes, including the newest schemes, contributed to positive outcomes.

**Professor Lino Briguglio** was awarded his Academic Staff Scholarship in 1979, and obtained a PhD in Economics from the University of Exeter. He is now a professor of economics at the University of Malta, and director of both the Islands and Small States Institute and the Gozo Centre. He was formerly head of the Department of Economics at the same university, a role which involved human resource management as well as course organisation and budgeting. In addition to his university roles, Professor Briguglio is also Commissioner for Fair Trading and Commissioner for Sustainable Development for the Government of Malta. In 2008, he shared the Nobel Peace Prize with fellow members of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC).

Professor Briguglio has been instrumental in the construction of the Economic Vulnerability Index and the Economic Resilience Index, both in collaboration with the Commonwealth Secretariat in London. He has also been involved in the Small States Forum of the World Bank and has been elected chairman of the Small States Network for Economic Development, under the auspices of the World Bank. As Director of the Islands and Small States Institute, he has been involved in various projects relating to small states issues, including the holding of training workshops for senior officials in small states all over the world.

## The next stage

The results of this survey are of interest in their own right, although analysis of the alumni survey is but one aspect of the work we have to do. The observation that over 2,000 alumni did respond – a group who were largely representative of our total alumni population, and the majority of whom gave very detailed information – serves to strengthen our findings. Overall, the results of the survey have provided both a wider picture of impact and the foundations for further, more detailed investigation.



Proportion of respondents reporting influencing government thinking, by decade of first award

In the next phase of the evaluation programme, we intend to drill down into specific groups, regions and sectors of employment, in an attempt to assess impact more thoroughly, adding further validity and reliability to our conclusions. Reports currently under development include analyses of impact in the Caribbean, in Health, and on higher education institutions. The ultimate objective of the exercise is to set our findings against the policy objectives of our funding bodies, and feed the results back into policy discussions. At the same time, we continue to trace increasing numbers of alumni, thus ensuring that the data on which our work is based becomes ever more robust.

**Carolyn McMaster** is a former Commonwealth Scholar from Canada, who received her MPhil in International Relations from the London School of Economics and Political Science in 1971. Since then, she has had an illustrious career in development assistance, diplomacy and international relations. Most recently, Carolyn was Canadian Deputy High Commissioner to New Zealand, where she managed the political, economic, cultural affairs, academic relations, consular and development assistance programmes in the High Commission. The role also included considerable reporting, consultation with public and private sector and NGO representatives, and assessment and approval of development assistance in six Pacific islands.

Prior to this post, she was Deputy Director of Commonwealth Affairs at the Canadian Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade (DFAIT). During the 1990s, she spent five years as Deputy Chairperson of the DFAIT Southern Africa Task Force, and then five years as Canadian Deputy High Commissioner to South Africa.

*'As a planning officer in the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) and as a CIDA Field Representative responsible on two different postings for Botswana, Lesotho, Swaziland, Kenya and Uganda, I had a major influence on the design and implementation of Canadian development assistance programmes and projects in Eastern and Southern Africa in a wide range of sectors, including health,*

*education, environment, agriculture, job creation and poverty reduction. My work on and in South Africa involved shaping the direction of Canadian policy towards South and Southern Africa in governance and conflict resolution, recommending specific policy initiatives, and consulting other public and private sector and NGO individuals involved in South Africa. As head of the Commonwealth section at DFAIT, I provided direction to Canada's involvement in the Commonwealth, including on the scope and priorities of Commonwealth governance and technical assistance programmes, with a particular focus on the Commonwealth's role in Zimbabwe, Fiji and Pakistan.'*

The Commonwealth Scholarship Commission in the United Kingdom (CSC) is responsible for managing Britain's contribution to the Commonwealth Scholarship and Fellowship Plan (CSFP).

The CSC supports around 750 awards annually. Awards are funded by the Department for International Development (for developing Commonwealth countries) and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills in partnership with UK universities (for developed Commonwealth countries). The CSC makes available seven types of award, and also nominates UK citizens for scholarships to study in other Commonwealth countries under the CSFP.

The CSC is a non-departmental public body in its own right, and members are appointed in line with the Code of Practice of the Office of the Commissioner for Public Appointments. The Commission's secretariat is provided by the Association of Commonwealth Universities; financial and welfare support for scholars is provided by the British Council.

The CSFP is an international programme under which member governments offer scholarships and fellowships to citizens of other Commonwealth countries. The Plan was established at the first Commonwealth education conference in 1959 and is reviewed by Ministers at their triennial meetings – the only scholarship scheme in the world to receive such high-level recognition.





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