

Executive summary

Tertiary education is pivotal in developing a highly-qualified and skilled workforce capable of contributing to socioeconomic development, as well as growth and sustainability. These challenges affect all states, regardless of their stage of development. It is vital, therefore, that higher education (HE) is accessible to all those who would benefit. With the ever-increasing costs of HE globally, international scholarships are well placed to enable study in world-class institutions without the financial constraints.

The Commonwealth Scholarship Commission in the UK (CSC) derives its funding from several governmental departments and has awarded around 17,000 scholarships and fellowships since its inception. Approximately 1,580 (roughly 8%) of these awards have been made to candidates from the Pacific Islands, Australia, New Zealand, and South East Asia. In order to gauge the impact of these scholarships, the CSC is currently undertaking a process of evaluation, through the analysis of the impact of awards on individuals, organisations, and countries. This impact is then assessed in light of the regional and national priorities of states, as well as the objectives of our funding bodies.

As part of the CSC Evaluation and Monitoring Programme, a detailed survey was distributed to alumni from around the Commonwealth in 2008. Over 2,200 responses were received, and preliminary findings were published in 2009. This report builds on these findings to present a regionally-focused analysis, in which we aim to assess impact on the Pacific Islands, Australia and New Zealand, and South East Asia, in terms of global development challenges and regional issues.

This report can be seen as covering three very distinct sub-regions in the Pacific which, while close in geographical terms, are vastly different in terms of development. In-depth analysis of the three sub-regions will be conducted separately in Chapter Three.

From this report, we are able to demonstrate that:

Scholarships are having an impact on individuals gaining important skills and expertise

- 82% of Pacific Islander award holders and 98% of South East Asian award holders reported that they had gained knowledge in their field of expertise. This figure is even higher for those from Australia and New Zealand, where 100% reported increased knowledge, 93% significantly.
- Awards made to all nations covered by the report have been fairly consistent across the decades (the peak was 461 in the 1980s), with Papua New Guinea and Fiji performing most strongly amongst the Pacific Islands. Subjects studied have also remained consistent, and are reflective of national priorities.

These skills are being utilised within the region

- The majority of our alumni reported working in their home countries. 100% of those responding from the Pacific Islands confirmed that they are working in their home countries, and 75% of Australians and New Zealanders and 97% of those from South East Asia reported the same.
- 73% of Pacific Islanders, 87% of Australians and New Zealanders, and 81% of South East Asians reported that their scholarship or fellowship contributed to the advancement of their careers. Roughly 90% of all respondents felt that they use the skills and expertise gained through their award in the course of their employment. 100% of Pacific Islanders reported increased influence at work, with 92% of respondents from South East Asia and 83% of Australians and New Zealanders reporting the same.

Alumni are having an impact in key priority areas

- 84% of all respondents from this region reported having an impact in one or more of 12 key priority areas, in one or more ways (91% of Pacific Islanders, 82% of Australians, 85% of New Zealanders, and 92% of South East Asians).
- The most likely way for individuals to make an impact is through projects, where 78% of respondents reported an impact in one or more priority areas.
- 44% reported making an impact through influencing government, and 41% confirmed that they have had a wider socioeconomic impact.
- Impact was most reported across the Asia-Pacific region in the key priority areas of Scientific and Research Applications, Health, Quantity and Quality of Education, and Environmental Protection.
- 25 case studies are included in this report, highlighting the accomplishments and impact of Commonwealth Scholars and Fellows from the region.
- The depth of impact is also shown, with many scholars demonstrating engagement at various levels, in different areas of impact.

This report demonstrates that Commonwealth Scholars and Fellows are making a positive impact in a wide variety of areas in their home countries. Commonwealth Scholarships and Fellowships provide award holders with relevant skills and expertise, enabling them to return home and contribute to development in areas such as economic growth, environmental sustainability, agriculture, and regional cooperation. The CSC will continue its evaluation process, ensuring that the consistent review of all of our programmes secures their improvement and extends their positive impact into the future.