

Executive summary

'Tertiary education institutions have a critical role in supporting knowledge-driven economic growth strategies and the construction of democratic, socially cohesive societies.'

World Bank, *Constructing Knowledge Societies:*

New Challenges for Tertiary Education (2002)

The role of higher education institutions (HEIs) and their staff in contributing to socio-economic development has received greater attention in recent years from donors and development organisations. This shift acknowledges the importance of higher education in a range of areas vital for development, from research and development and innovation to the provision of high-quality training for professionals from fields as diverse as engineering, medicine, education, and finance. The Commonwealth Scholarship Commission in the United Kingdom (CSC) has long recognised this and, with large numbers of former Commonwealth Scholars and Fellows working in higher education – the majority in developing countries – is well placed to investigate the impact that investment in higher education professionals and institutions can have on socioeconomic development.

This report, therefore, examines the impact that scholarships and fellowships can have on individuals and on HEIs, and the impact that these individuals and institutions can then have on economic and social development. It provides some context by reporting on the targeted awards offered to academic staff and students, before moving on to assess the impact of the more than 1,350 alumni working in higher education who responded to a 2008 impact evaluation survey. Alongside some data analysis, the report highlights a number of individual case studies and puts them in the context of the Millennium Development Goals, supporting the continuing relevance of such awards and their contribution to development.

Finally, the report narrows its focus to take a closer look at Commonwealth Scholarships and Fellowships in the context of three specific HEIs – namely **Makerere University** in Uganda, the **University of Dhaka** in Bangladesh, and the **University of the West Indies** in the Caribbean – and provides in-depth case studies of three individual staff members at these institutions.

The main findings of this report are:

- **Higher education professionals are able to have an impact on development issues.** Our survey respondents report many examples of relevant activity.
- **The CSC is well placed to have an impact on higher education and to work in partnership with overseas HEIs.** Alongside other programmes, it has offered over 4,100 specifically targeted scholarships and fellowships to academic staff and overseas PhD students nominated by over 340 institutions, mostly in South Asia and sub-Saharan Africa.
- **A high proportion of former Commonwealth Scholars and Fellows work in higher education.** Of the 2,226 responses to the 2008 survey, for example, 63% work in education – 61% in higher education.
- **Commonwealth Scholarships and Fellowships contribute to the career development of higher education professionals.** 87% of respondents working in higher education who had completed their studies at least 12 months before the survey reported that the award had helped them make advancements in their careers.
- **Commonwealth Scholarships and Fellowships enable individuals to acquire skills and knowledge and to pass them on.** 99% of respondents working in higher education reported gaining knowledge in their area of expertise, and 96% reported using the skills and knowledge gained on award in their workplaces.

- **Commonwealth Scholarships and Fellowships do not lead to brain drain from developing countries.** 94% of the respondents from developing countries working in higher education reported working or living in their home countries. This rises to 95% if those working in their home regions are included.
- **Commonwealth Scholarships and Fellowships are linked to the introduction of new practices and innovations in Commonwealth HEIs.** 90% of those respondents working in higher education reported that they had been able to introduce new practices and innovations in their workplaces as a result of their awards.
- **Alumni working in higher education report involvement in development-related activity.** 92% of respondents working in higher education reported having an impact in at least one of 12 key development priority areas, with 28.5% reporting influencing government policy, and 31% having an impact on socioeconomic development in at least one area.
- **Impact reaches beyond individual subject areas and affects a wide range of development issues.** Alumni working in higher education also report involvement in a wide range of development-related activities, in many cases, in priority areas unrelated to their specific course of study or area of expertise.

The report then provides some context to the role of Commonwealth Scholarships and Fellowships for specific institutions, by focusing on three key Commonwealth universities and providing some background to both the institutions and former Commonwealth Scholars who work there. Our in-depth interviews with individuals at the three universities give further insight into the benefits of Commonwealth Scholarships and Fellowships for both individual staff and their employing institutions.

In particular, it was found that:

- **Commonwealth Scholarships provide opportunities.** Awards have enabled individual staff to acquire qualifications and skills that would otherwise have been difficult or impossible to obtain. *'I wanted to go on and do my PhD, and there were not many resources available for me besides the Commonwealth Scholarship... without a PhD...there isn't room for advancement or to have impact.'*
- **The scheme offers added value through its international nature.** Studying in the UK can provide access to resources and equipment unavailable at home, as well as enabling contact with other students and peers in similar fields. *'You gain the opportunity to work with many people. I worked with one fellow from Poland who is now a minister...There were colleagues from Canada, Africa – because of the diverse population, there was a real cross-fertilisation of ideas.'*
- **There is evidence of continuing collaboration between host and home institutions after awards have ended.** The international focus of the scheme has opened up opportunities for partnerships and long-term collaboration. Almost 70% of respondents from the three focus institutions reported maintaining links with their host institutions in the UK.
- **The prestigious and unique nature of Commonwealth Scholarships can also have an impact.** The reputation and competitiveness of the programme can be a useful tool for alumni in influencing policy and practice, both within their institutions and on local and national levels. *'The Commonwealth Scholarships are some of the best regarded... I think that I have benefited from the award in part as it gave me a foot in the academic door, as well as the policymaking door.'*
- **HEIs also benefit from these awards.** All 21 respondents from Makerere University, for example, reported using the skills and knowledge gained on award in their work and that they were able to introduce new practices and innovations in their workplaces. *'I certainly would not have been inspired to pursue such a centre if not for my time at Cambridge, and seeing how the collegial structure there operates and what it is able to accomplish.'*

The report concludes that, although Commonwealth Scholarships and Fellowships are given to individuals, they have a demonstrable impact on higher education – both institutions and the sector as a whole. We have shown that alumni have returned to their home universities and not only developed and led new modules and programmes which nurture scientists and health care workers of the future, but also reached out beyond the institution gates and impacted upon policymakers at various levels of government, engaged in collaborative projects involving multiple stakeholders, and influenced wider society. It is in these links between institutions of higher learning and wider society where many Commonwealth Scholars and Fellows are able to have potentially considerable impact on development and, as such, we conclude that these awards allow for the primary objectives of the scheme to be met.