

## Conclusions

The Commonwealth Professional Fellowship scheme is a particularly development-focused CSC programme with the added benefit that award holders are often able to have an effect on their workplaces almost immediately. The CSC's recognition of the value of the programme is evident in the increasing numbers of awards offered since its inception, with numbers rising from 23 in 2002 to 119 in 2012 and, although the variety of data collection methods employed since the start of the programme does not allow for a rigorous full scale evaluation, the data available does seem to justify this.

In particular, data collected over the last ten years supports the hypothesis that the Professional Fellowship programme contributes to development impact on institutions and wider society by supporting mid-career professionals. It shows, for example, that over three-quarters of Professional Fellowship awards (77%) are given to people whose country of citizenship is in sub-Saharan Africa, with the majority of the remainder going to individuals from countries in South Asia (16%) and the Caribbean (7%). Rates of return are very high, as you might expect for a short-term fellowship, and survey results show that 95% of respondents are currently residing in their home region. These same survey results also show that the vast majority of respondents state that they would have not been able to undertake the same or similar programme in the UK without the Commonwealth Professional Fellowship, indicating the necessity of the scheme in providing opportunities to people that would not otherwise have been possible.

On a practical level, the survey shows overwhelmingly positive results with regard to acquisition of knowledge and skills, as illustrated by 96% of respondents reporting that they gained expert knowledge in their field. Furthermore, results show that the scheme prepares individuals to transfer knowledge to others, as shown by 90% of respondents stating that they were able to subsequently transfer the skills and knowledge gained while on award. The survey also demonstrates the relevance of the programme, as 89% of survey respondents reported using specific skills and knowledge they gained while on award in their workplace. These findings are further reinforced by the focus group discussion that was held with a select number of Professional Fellows in November 2012, which also confirms the benefits of the programme, with overall results highlighting the programme's role in helping to improve skills and knowledge, and providing individuals with opportunities to enhance their professional development as well as processes within their work environments.

With regard to wider development impact, the survey data again shows very positive results. 81% of respondents reported having socioeconomic impact, compared with 60% of Commonwealth Scholars who studied for a PhD and 75% of Commonwealth Scholars who studied for a Master's degree reporting the same impact in the main evaluation survey. 49% of Professional Fellow respondents stated having impact in government policy, while in the main survey 35% of both PhD and Master's Scholars reported impact in this area. This provides clear evidence that Professional Fellowships are one of the most effective of the CSC's schemes in terms of having impact in key development areas.

As part of the new methods implemented for evaluating the Professional Fellowship programme, host organisations and Fellows' employers were also sent surveys. Although the response rate from employers (3%) was too low to make any conclusive remarks, the host organisations' results provided some valuable insight into their perspectives of the programme. In line with responses from the Fellows, host organisations felt that the Fellowship provided a high level of knowledge and skills gain and that they are able to provide industry expertise. The host organisations' survey also supported the notion that Fellowships do have development impact, with the vast majority (85%) of respondents reporting impact. This type of evidence is also supported by the work of hosts who have undertaken their own evaluations.

In conclusion, although more data needs to be collected over time in order to conduct a full-scale evaluation study, the preliminary results from this year's survey and recent focus group discussions do provide very convincing evidence that the Professional Fellows scheme is a highly valuable element of the CSC portfolio of awards. It enables individuals to gain a wealth of knowledge and skills that they are then able to transfer to other colleagues and to their organisations, as a result often having an impact on wider society. It is the view of the authors, therefore, that the CSC should continue to invest its resources in this programme. In the meantime, as a result of the findings of this review, we suggest the following recommendations to ensure the continuing relevance and effectiveness of the programme.

## Recommendations

- If evidence collected from Professional Fellows is to be verified and supported, it is essential that we expand attempts to engage with other stakeholders such as host organisations and employers. In terms of the latter particularly, we stress the need to continue with the employers' survey exercise and actively seek to build closer working relationships with them to increase response rates.

- We also recognise the important role of host organisations in terms of data collection and ensuring the relevance and efficiency of the programme, and recommend that measures to work more closely with them are put in place. This includes the Evaluation Team working more closely with the programme administration team to make the most of existing relationships with hosts and implementing a considered and targeted host organisations' survey programme.
- During the process of this review it was decided that data collection for Professional Fellows should follow a different time schedule to that for the longer and more academic awards. It is noted, however, that, due to the complex nature of Professional Fellowship cohorts and start dates, a consistent timeline must be set with regard to when surveys are sent out to Fellows. The recommendation, for the purpose of administration, is that surveys are sent in batches no more than twice a year, and cohorts should be decided based on award year and start dates.
- With regard to gender parity in take-up, more men take up Professional Fellowships than women. The percentages change year-on-year. 2010 was the most balanced year, with 45% of Fellowships being taken up by women; however, this decreased to 40% in 2012. Therefore, it is important to ensure that there is gender parity year-on-year, which could perhaps require further engagement with nominating organisations for this scheme.
- The success of both the Fellows' and the host organisations' focus groups – not only in terms of generating ideas and collecting data, but also in building good relations with current Fellows and hosts for the future – leads to the recommendation that we continue to host such events where appropriate and also to work closely with colleagues in the programme administration team to make the most of other opportunities to engage with Fellows and host organisations.

Each of these recommendations can be applied in the coming months, building on work already commenced and allowing for a more rigorous analysis of specific outcomes and impact in due course. In the meantime, this review confirms that the CSC's support for the Professional Fellowship scheme is well placed and that these awards should continue to form a key element of its portfolio.