

Executive summary

The Commonwealth Professional Fellowship scheme was established in 2002, the newest of seven programmes offered by the Commonwealth Scholarship Commission in the United Kingdom (CSC). Aimed at professionals working in development-related organisations, its goal is to provide mid-career professionals with the opportunity to enhance knowledge and skills in their given sector, and in turn have catalytic effects on their workplaces. The programme has a strong focus on development and targets candidates working in one of the following sectors: agriculture/fisheries/forestry, economic growth, education, engineering/science/technology, environment, governance, and public health.

In 2012, the CSC began work on a review of the programme over the past ten years, starting with an overview of the data currently held on the scheme. It was noted that, although regular monitoring had been undertaken and Professional Fellows had been included in broader evaluation and alumni exercises, the data collected showed some gaps and inconsistencies in the way it had been collected, not least the large amount of qualitative data collected as free text narrative. The first outcome of this review therefore is that, going forward, a new method of data collection will be employed in which regular surveys will be sent to Fellows, host organisations, and Fellows' employers, providing usable quantitative data to analyse.

That said, we do have a good amount of data and have collected more during the process of this review, which this report will seek to summarise by providing an overview of the scheme over the past decade and of the reported impact of its alumni. In the first chapter, we begin by outlining the purpose of the review, new activity that has been implemented in regard to evaluation of the scheme, and the scope of data that we currently hold on Professional Fellows. Chapter 2 gives a brief summary of the Professional Fellows themselves, exploring who they are and the disciplines they work in, as well as describing the survey results and analysis from the updated survey sent specifically to Professional Fellows who undertook an award between 2008 and 2011. Chapter 3 details the focus group discussion that was held in November 2012 with a group of Professional Fellows who undertook an award in 2012.

We then move on to consider the input and views of other participants in the programme: the hosts and employers. Chapter 4 consists of feedback from host organisations and employers on knowledge and skills gained from the award. It also includes results from a focus group discussion held in December 2012 with a select number of host organisations. Finally, Chapter 5 provides some individual examples of activity and subsequent outcomes as reported by Fellows after their return home, and some further examples from host organisations.

The report ends with some concluding remarks and recommendations for next steps. To summarise these, we find that, overall, the findings yield very positive results with regards to the Professional Fellowship scheme. The structure of the programme is very different from other CSC awards, in that it targets mid-career professionals and only lasts for a short duration, usually up to three months. However, it is a programme that seems able to demonstrate almost immediate impact upon return home, particularly within Fellows' workplaces. In recent years, the CSC has recognised the positive outcomes of the Professional Fellowship scheme by increasing the number of awards offered.

The notion of institutional capacity building is a key aspect of the Fellowships and is a central theme of the updated Professional Fellows survey, as well as the host organisation and employer surveys. One recommendation of this review is to develop this into a full report once more data has been collected and a more in-depth analysis can be conducted. However, in the interim, this review shows that:

- In total, 745 Professional Fellowships have been awarded as of 2012, with numbers increasing in 2013.
- The majority (68%) of Professional Fellows come from low income countries, reflecting the CSC's and DFID's focus on development impact. Over three-quarters (77%) of these awards have been given to individuals from sub-Saharan African countries.
- Professional Fellows undertake fellowships in a variety of sectors, with public health (38%) being the most popular.
- With regard to gender parity in take-up, more men take up Professional Fellowships than women. 2010 was the most balanced year, with 45% of Fellowships being taken up by women; however, this decreased to 40% in 2012.

In terms of survey responses, a total survey population of 278 Professional Fellow alumni were sent a separate evaluation survey in 2013, of which 114 responded. This response rate of 41% shows considerable improvement from previous years, and supports the recommendation that Professional Fellowship evaluation

needs to be better targeted and conducted separately from that of other CSC alumni. 46% of survey respondents were female, which is an improvement on the equivalent figure for the CSC's main alumni survey, whose survey population in the same period was 37% female. From the analysis, it was found that:

- **The vast majority of Professional Fellows return home upon completing their award, which fulfils the CSC expectation that alumni will return home following their award to make an impact in their home countries and institutions.** Survey results show that 95% of survey respondents currently reside in their home region.
- **Professional Fellowships provide individuals with the chance to enhance their work skills and knowledge that they would have not otherwise had.** Findings show that 84% of survey respondents felt that it would have been impossible to undertake the Fellowship without the Commonwealth award.
- **Professional Fellowships help individuals gain further academic and professional qualifications.** Of the respondents that answered the question regarding academic qualifications (n=49), 30 reported receiving further academic qualifications, of which 83% felt that their Professional Fellowship contributed to this. Of the respondents that answered the question regarding professional qualifications (n=49), 40 responded that they had undertaken further professional qualifications, of which 77.5% reported the Fellowship contributing to this.
- **Undertaking Professional Fellowships contributes to individuals' career advancement.** Survey data shows that 45% of respondents reported obtaining a more senior position at their workplace within 12 months of completing their Professional Fellowship, of which 66% noted that the Fellowship contributed significantly to their career advancement. 67% of respondents reported that their Professional Fellowship played a significant role in gaining further advancements after the 12-month period following completion of their award.
- **Professional Fellowships provide the necessary skills to enable individuals to transfer knowledge they gain while on award. Furthermore, the Fellowship enables individuals to contribute to institutional capacity building.** Survey findings highlight that 89% of respondents stated that they had trained other colleagues on specific skills that were gained from undertaking the Fellowship, highlighting that knowledge transfer is far-reaching. 80% of respondents reported that they were able to make changes in how work or programmes were conducted in their workplace as a result of the Fellowship, with 73% asserting that they were able to establish new areas of work upon return home. 70% of respondents reported that departmental policies had been created or changed as a result of their input, while 66% reported having had influence over organisational policies.
- **Through direct and catalytic effects, Professional Fellowships play a significant role in contributing to socioeconomic development.** Survey results highlight that 81% of respondents claim to have had impact on socioeconomic development, which is a far higher percentage than reported by Commonwealth Scholars in the main evaluation survey (Masters' 74%, PhDs 60%). When breaking down development impact to specific areas, 53% (60 respondents) reported having an impact on education at the socioeconomic level. For those who reported socioeconomic impact in education, 57% (34 respondents) specified that this was in the area of research and training.
- **In addition to enhancing professional development, Professional Fellowships provide invaluable life experience.** The focus group discussion held in November 2012 with a select number of Professional Fellows highlighted how their Fellowship enabled them to gain an understanding of British culture and conversely gain an insight into the UK's global perspectives, which was viewed by Fellows as a very positive outcome.