



# Commonwealth Scholarship Commission in the UK

## Successes and complexities: the outcomes of UK Commonwealth Scholarships 1960-2012

Matt Mawer, Shireen Quraishi and Rachel Day, 2016

### Background

The Commonwealth Scholarship and Fellowship Plan (CSFP) was established in 1959 to share educational experience, promote intellectual achievement, and contribute to changing needs among the diverse states that constitute the Commonwealth. By the late 2000s, around 30,000 individuals had been supported for academic study and professional mobility, the majority holding awards tenable in the United Kingdom for periods ranging from several months to several years. The UK has continued its long-term commitment to the Plan and currently offers around 900 awards every year for study at postgraduate and doctoral level, as well as shorter mobility awards to professional, academic and medical staff.

The Commonwealth Scholarship Commission in the UK (CSC) is the body created by Act of Parliament to administer the United Kingdom's contribution to the CSFP. As part of this work, in our 1960-2012 report, we present findings from a unique survey dataset charting the post-scholarship outcomes of almost 2,100 Commonwealth Scholarship alumni. Our data includes participants from each scholarship programme operated by the CSC, who are currently residing in 84 countries, having studied over 100 academic disciplines, and having been hosted at over 300 UK institutions. The survey gathered responses from individuals who had held scholarships as far back as 1960 and in *every subsequent year* until 2012.

Through our analysis of this richly detailed analytic resource, we present an account of the varied and compelling evidence for social, economic, and political impact catalysed by Commonwealth Scholars. We also explore the limitations of the data, noting the complexities of investigating impacts at individual, institutional, and societal level. The implications of these analyses are relevant to policymakers, scholarship administrators, and researchers across a broad international constituency.

### Highlights: individual trajectories

#### 1. Patterns in employment sector participation

Almost all Scholars were currently employed full-time, with the remainder predominately having retired. Scholars found that their employers, especially in academic institutions, were very supportive of applying for a Commonwealth Scholarship, and a majority returned to their previous employers after completing their studies. A net effect of Commonwealth Scholarships has been to sustain and modestly increase participation in the academic sector – an important outcome given the challenges to the vibrancy and sustainability of the academy within many Commonwealth states. Impacts on the private sector were less evident, primarily because relatively few Scholars worked in the private sector either before or after their studies. Our analysis has not, however, accounted for indirect commercial impacts through scientific activity, governance changes, or advocacy for infrastructure spending.

## 2. Trends in robust gains

The perceived gains from Commonwealth Scholarships were high across a range of important outcomes, from increased technical knowledge and access to equipment or expertise unavailable in Scholars' home countries, to the subsequent application of skills in the workplace. At a more granular level, we observed that perceived gains were stronger for Scholars originating from the Commonwealth's lower income regions. Scholars from high income states tended to experience strong personal development, but slightly lesser perceived ability to influence organisational and societal outcomes. Scholars working in the academic sector were particularly likely to report both using the knowledge they gained on scholarship in their subsequent work and also transferring skills to others, often through teaching.

## 3. The ebbs and flows of residency

At the most general level, our data indicated that 18% of Commonwealth Scholars and Fellows were currently living outside of their home region. However, this figure concealed a lot of variation at different periods of time post-scholarship. Survey respondents who had finished their scholarship only 1-2 years previously were almost all currently living at home, whereas those who had finished 3-4 years previously, for instance, were abroad in much higher proportion. Our findings indicated that 'return' post-scholarship is a fluid process with peaks and troughs. Evaluation thus might usefully go beyond concepts of 'return' and 'non-return' and examine patterns of returning, sojourning, and migratory behaviour across time.

Before we started the hospice facility, in our state almost 50% of patients who were terminally ill died in their houses in pain and distress. They had no other option... But now Aastha Hospice has emerged as an option for all people who want support during the final journey of life... By our efforts hospice care facility has been well accepted and recognised by various government and corporate organisations.

**Dr Abhishek Shukla**

2010 Distance Learning Scholar, PG  
Diploma Palliative Medicine/ Care,  
Cardiff University

## Highlights: catalytic effects

### 1. The broad picture

Involvement in development activities was widespread: two-thirds of survey respondents reported that their activities had socioeconomic impact, while just over one-third reported that they had influenced government policymaking. As might be expected, a greater proportion of respondents reported impact at relatively lesser breadths: 71% at institutional level, 58% at local level, 45% at national level, and 25% at international level. In the context of the programme's longevity, these proportions potentially translate into large numbers of individuals; the programme in the UK has funded over 25,000 individuals across its duration. Scholars had worked across a spectrum of fields, but education was the field in which the highest proportion of respondents reported impact, and also in which activities were perceived to have the greatest impact. Support for the notion that Commonwealth Scholarships exert an impact wider than upon individual recipients was thus relatively strong.

### 2. Explaining variation in reported impact

Region of citizenship emerged as an important factor in explaining reported socioeconomic impact. The trends we observed tended to follow the patterns of scholarship selection priorities; *reported* development impact was higher among Scholars from regions in which *anticipated* development impact was an important criterion for choosing scholarship recipients. Interestingly, these regional effects were not nearly as pronounced in government policymaking impact as in socioeconomic impact. For understanding government policymaking impact, the type of degree studied provided some insight: postgraduate degrees were associated with lesser likelihood of reporting policymaking impact than fellowships and doctorates. However, there was also evidence of variation within postgraduate programmes – such as between distance learners and UK-based Scholars – and so these aggregate findings may be smoothing over a rather more complex picture.

FROM 2012-2015, THE CSC SURVEYED  
OVER 2,000 OF ITS ALUMNI

Currently live in **84** COUNTRIES  
Studied over **100** ACADEMIC DISCIPLINES  
Hosted at over **300** UK INSTITUTIONS

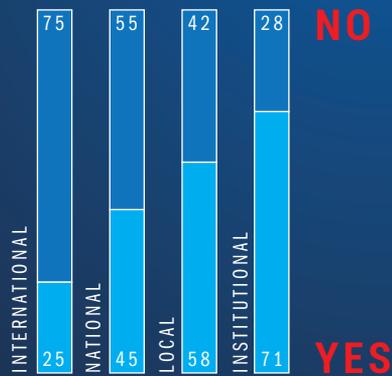
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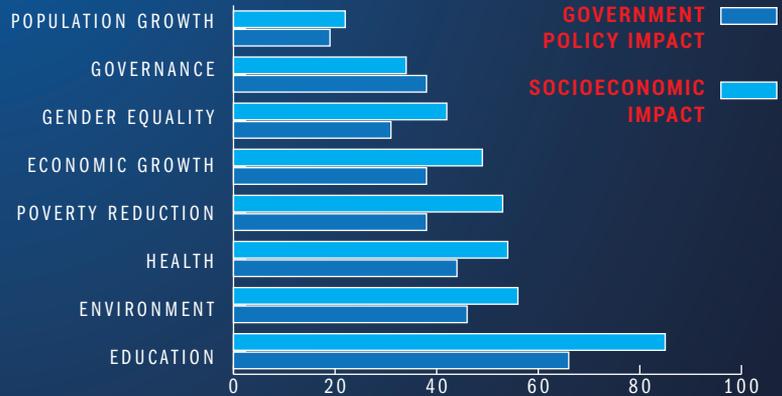
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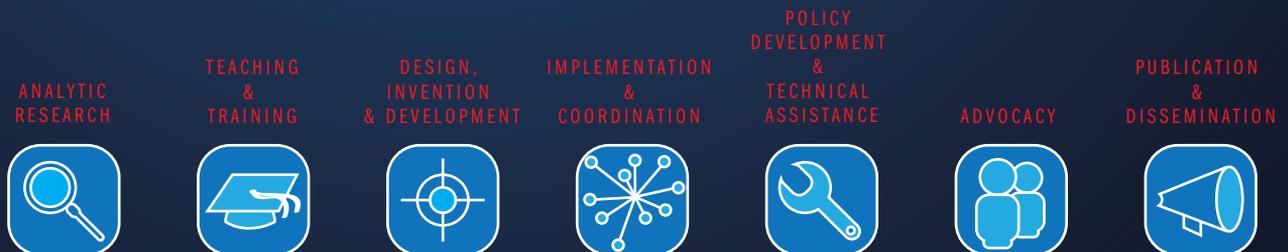
LEVELS OF IMPACT



AREAS OF IMPACT



IMPACT ACTIVITIES INCLUDED



### 3. Types of impacts

Scholars primarily reported impact being generated through one or more of seven activities:

- Analytic research
- Teaching and training
- Design, invention, and development
- Implementation and coordination
- Policy development and technical assistance
- Advocacy
- Publication and dissemination

The Commonwealth Scholarship and Fellowship Plan is not a sector-specific training scheme, but a broad tool for national governments and individuals to pursue priority areas of study. In this context, it is important to recognise that impacts are generated in a substantial range of intellectual and practical spaces, diffused across geography, discipline, and sector. The findings show that, although Scholars' occupations and disciplinary foci may differ, they are involved in both implementation and developing the state of the art.

### 4. Persistent international networks

The level of continued communication with the UK was highest with academic and student contacts, in most cases likely the connections made with tutors, supervisors, and immediate peers through study. The connections deemed most salient to Scholars' career development were the academic and university contacts made with UK institutions and institutional staff; social ties and contact with fellow students were deemed considerably less important for professional development. Social ties appeared to degrade over time, with active contact between Scholars and both fellow UK students and other social contacts less prevalent for those having finished their studies many years previously. Professional contacts, conversely, did not tend to degrade over time, although fewer Scholars had established these networks while in the UK.

### Considerations for the future

The new Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) have articulated a specific target for increasing the provision of scholarships to developing countries. In doing so, they have reinforced the importance of programmes such as the Commonwealth Scholarship and Fellowship Plan in the landscape of international development. As focus inevitably turns to assessing how this target can be met, there will be further need for sophisticated, policy-relevant scholarship evaluation.

*Successes and complexities: the outcomes of UK Commonwealth Scholarships 1960-2012* completes a cycle of CSC evaluation surveys that ran between 2012 and 2015. Drawing on the methodological lessons learned through this exercise, a longitudinal survey framework has been developed through which the outcomes of current and future Commonwealth Scholars and Fellows will be tracked. As the CSC puts these lessons into practice, we hope to contribute both to the future direction of Commonwealth Scholarships and Fellowships and to the communal knowledge of colleagues across the global community of scholarship programme administrators and evaluators.

The Research and Advocacy Unit (RAU) has had a material influence on both women's rights and good governance in the short time it has been operating. It was the first organisation to document politically motivated rape... RAU has also had a serious contribution to better governance through its work on elections, the law, and other issues... It is highly respected within Zimbabwe, and by international governments and agencies.

**Tony Reeler**

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