



Council for Education in the Commonwealth

House of Commons – House of Lords

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UK Withdrawal of Support for Commonwealth Scholarships to Students from More Developed Commonwealth Countries

A Council for Education in the Commonwealth Briefing Note

The Commonwealth Scholarship and Fellowship Plan (CSFP) is a Commonwealth-wide programme, using an agreed multilateral framework, inaugurated in 1959. It operates bilaterally, providing awards mainly at postgraduate level for students from another Commonwealth country. To date, more than 25,000 individuals, drawn from every Commonwealth country and dependent territory, have benefited from the awards. Britain has been the principal donor to the Plan. Hitherto it has funded its contribution through the Foreign and Commonwealth Office for students from more developed Commonwealth countries (presently eight in number) – funding that is now to be discontinued: and through the Department for International Development (DFID) for the much larger number of awards for those from developing countries. The UK's overall outlay on CSFP was about £17m in 2007/08.

What are Commonwealth Scholarships?

Since 1959 the Commonwealth Scholarship and Fellowship Plan (CSFP) has provided a multilateral framework through which any Commonwealth country can offer scholarships and fellowships to citizens of another member country. (See Annex 2 for the agreed General Principles governing the Plan). Scholarships are mainly intended to facilitate postgraduate study at Masters or Doctoral level by the most able students: and Fellowships are available to tertiary education staff for post-doctoral study, teaching and research. Typically, over the history of the Plan they have been for full-time study lasting one to three years: but more recently there has been diversification within the Plan to provide awards for shorter periods of study and study through distance learning. The awards normally include tuition fees and associated academic expenses, board and lodging, and international travel.

The Plan's overall operation is co-ordinated by the Commonwealth Secretariat in co-operation with the Association of Commonwealth Universities. It has been subjected to Ten-Year Reviews (the last, however, being in 1993) and is also regularly reviewed by Commonwealth Ministers of Education at their triennial Conferences (16th Conference Cape Town 2006, 17th Conference planned for Kuala Lumpur in June 2009). Currently there are about 1,700 awards being held in 15 Commonwealth countries: the UK plays host to about 1,100 Scholars and Fellows and receives about 50 awards from other Commonwealth countries.

Each individual country has its own Commonwealth Scholarship Commission to manage its programme. The UK Commonwealth Scholarship Commission is based at the Association of Commonwealth Universities, operating under contract from Government. (See www.cscuk.org.uk).

The Standing of Commonwealth Scholarships

The prestige of Commonwealth Scholarships has been carefully built up over fifty years. In its return to the last Commonwealth Education Ministers Conference, New Zealand described Commonwealth Scholarships as 'the most competitive and highly sought after' scholarships for its citizens. DFID's

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independent review in 2007 was extremely favourable, and the last published review by FCO (2003) also found that Commonwealth Scholarships were more robust than the Chevening programme that will now have sole responsibility for future FCO awards. A review by the House of Commons Science Select Committee (2004) commended the innovative approach of the Commission in several areas.

Change in UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office Policy on Support for CSFP

In spite of the high regard in which CSFP is held, and without consulting the UK Commonwealth Scholarship Commission or UK universities beforehand, the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary, Rt Hon David Miliband, announced in Parliament on Thursday March 13th 2008 that the Foreign and Commonwealth Office intends to end its funding of CSFP awards for Scholars and Fellows from eight more developed Commonwealth countries, namely Australia, Bahamas, Brunei Darussalam, Canada, Cyprus, Malta, New Zealand and Singapore. New Scholars and Fellows from those countries would be able to take up awards in the 2008/2009 academic year and to complete their courses of study: but no new awards would be made thereafter. Awards under the separate Chevening programme of scholarships and fellowships would continue to be available to citizens of those countries.

Currently the FCO spends £2.05m. p.a. on CSFP: this covers about 90-100 Scholars and Fellows in any year, including a new annual intake of about 50, and continuers from previous years (see Annex). The FCO has contributed to the funding of the CSFP ever since its launch at the first Commonwealth Education Conference in Oxford in 1959. Before the establishment of a separate aid/development ministry all CSFP awards were funded through the Commonwealth Relations Office/FCO.

The more numerous UK Commonwealth Scholarships for developing countries, on the Department for International Development (DFID) vote, are NOT directly affected by this latest decision and total UK support for the Plan will actually increase in money terms.

The budget allocations for CSFP from the two Departments will therefore be:

2007/08:	DFID = £14.5m	FCO = £2.05m	Total = £16.55m
2008/09:	DFID = £15.93m	FCO = £2.05m	Total = £17.98m
2009/10	DFID = £17.5m	FCO = *?	
2010/11:	DFID = £17.5m	FCO = *?	

*Funding required to meet the costs of continuing Scholars admitted in 2008/09 and earlier.

The FCO Decision and reasons given

The cut in CSFP is part of a larger, £10m., cut in FCO funding for scholarships generally. The FCO has had three scholarship programmes on its budget:

1. Chevening Scholarships and Fellowships, which are now to be cut back from £35m p.a. to £27m. Chevening awards (1072 in 2007-08) are made at the discretion of individual diplomatic posts abroad and are intended to identify and support future leaders who would form an attachment to Britain with resultant future political and trading benefits for the UK. The awards are mostly one-year awards for programmes at master's level – doctoral study is excluded. The programme includes a wide range of countries, including most CSFP beneficiaries: it concentrates on a group of 20-30 priority countries – but the priority list includes only six Commonwealth countries (plus Zimbabwe), none of them being recipients of FCO CSFP awards. In 2007-2008 Commonwealth countries received 255 awards of which 26 were for the eight countries now losing FCO CSFP awards; 124 for India, Pakistan, Nigeria and Malaysia; 101 for 40 other independent CW countries; 4 for dependencies.
2. Marshall Scholarships for the USA whose allocation is to be left unchanged at about £2.2m p.a. All UK publicly funded awards for Americans are through Marshall Awards: Americans are not eligible for Chevening Awards.

3. Commonwealth Scholarships and Fellowships, for which the allocation of £2.05m is now to be phased out.

The Chevening Scholarships do not operate on the basis of reciprocal awards for UK students. The Marshall Scholarships do, and to some extent the CSFP awards also.

The FCO explains its decision in the following terms

“We have found a transformed situation in higher education, and an FCO scholarship programme that has not always been well aligned to foreign policy goals. So we propose a smaller, better organised programme, focused on the leaders of tomorrow, from a wide range of backgrounds. The savings we make from this reform will support new priority programmes, principally on climate change.

As we reviewed our schemes we found a number of weaknesses. The purpose of the scholarship schemes has not always been clear. We have not always sought out students we thought could become international leaders. We have pursued high numbers of scholars, which has sometimes reduced focus on quality. We have not consistently done enough to build the personal relationships with the scholars that we need ... We have not always worked closely enough with our partner Government Departments to ensure the scholarship schemes work for them.”

Likely Consequences of the UK Decision

- The decision threatens to derail plans to expand and develop CSFP on its 50th anniversary at the 17th Conference of Commonwealth Education Ministers in Malaysia in June 2009. The proposal approved by Ministers in Cape Town was to develop CSFP to reach a new Commonwealth-wide target for CSFP of 2009 awards in 2009. An endowment fund, being set up at the request of Commonwealth Education Ministers to mark the anniversary, has already attracted commitments of almost £1 million. The very public withdrawal by FCO could severely undermine this international effort.
- In particular the diminution of CSFP awards-availability for Canadians and New Zealanders could pull the rug from under the feet of CSFP-supporters in those countries who have been successfully resisting their Governments’ efforts to downsize their CSFP programmes. Until now a major ‘carrot’ for these countries to participate in CSFP has been the availability of UK Commonwealth Scholarships/Fellowships for their nationals.
- The case of Canada is especially embarrassing as UK Government and civil society made successful strong representations to the Canadian Government when, two years ago, it threatened to sharply reduce its commitment to the Plan.
- Consequently opportunities for UK students to study abroad may be diminished at a time when the Government’s declared policy is to encourage more study abroad by UK nationals to reduce the imbalance between inflows and outflows of international students.
- The implied substitution of Chevening Awards for Commonwealth Scholarships is in direct conflict with the principle that CSFP awards should be distinct from other awards, and in the case of the eight more developed countries will entail the disappearance of UK Government-funded opportunities for students from these countries to engage in doctoral and research study in the UK, since doctoral programmes are excluded from Chevening.
- Even for awards at masters level under the Chevening programme the situation of the eight countries will be worse than they present experience under Chevening since the number of Chevening awards is being reduced overall by about a quarter, and the eight Commonwealth developing countries are not in the FCO list of priority countries despite their key importance in some cases as suppliers of key strategic materials (Canada and Australia) and importance in business relationships (Singapore).

- The importance the FCO attaches to the 8 countries may be gauged from the reduction of Chevening awards to them from 57 in 2005-06 to 26 in 2007-08. How will they fare in a situation where funding cuts will reduce the total number of awards by a quarter?
- UK academic institutions will in turn be serious losers if Scholars and Fellows from the eight countries cease to come for study and research. Cutting-edge science will in particular suffer, since scientific subjects are under-represented in Chevening awards.
- The policy embarks the UK on a slippery slope of excluding more and more countries from CSFP awards. Where Singapore and Bahamas are today, surely Malaysia and Trinidad and Tobago, (and Barbados and Botswana) could well follow tomorrow.
- CSFP displays virtues in many of the areas that the FCO describes as deficiencies in its Scholarship programmes (quality of selection, follow up of alumni). The FCO's catch-all criticisms of its own Scholarship programmes fail to recognise that while these strictures may apply to Chevening awards, they do not by and large apply to Commonwealth awards.

Commonwealth Principles

Aside from these likely harmful consequences, there are serious objections in principle to what is proposed. If implemented the decision would

- Weaken the Commonwealth itself by expressing a vote of no confidence in one of the few major tangible manifestations of the Commonwealth's reality.
- Undermine the principle of reciprocity on which Commonwealth friendship and co-operation are based
- Infringe the very principles of equality, mutuality, and inclusiveness on which the Commonwealth is built. The Commonwealth bridges differences and diversity: its essence is to be a family of nations equal in status.
- Deal a blow to CSFP's innovative founding concept, worthy of emulation elsewhere that co-operation can fruitfully be based on bilateral action within an agreed multilateral framework.

Action

It will require the combined efforts of many individuals and organisations engaging in protest, advocacy and dialogue to achieve any modification or cancellation of this unfortunate decision by the FCO. Steps that individuals could take include

- ❖ writing individual letters to Members of Parliament and/or the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary, and asking others to write also
- ❖ persuading relevant organisations to which you belong to send a submission to Government
- ❖ signing the petition organised by Commonwealth Scholars themselves on the internet at <http://petitions.pm.gov.uk/comschols>
- ❖ volunteering time to assist in the campaign (please contact Peter Williams at CEC –see below).

Further information

UK Commonwealth Scholarship Commission

www.ukcsc.ac.uk

Council for Education in the Commonwealth

Contact Peter Williams peterrwilliams@onetel.com or on 01306 501788.

ANNEX 1: STATISTICS

1. FCO-funded Commonwealth Scholarships

	(a) New Awards taken-up				(b) Selections
	2005	2006	2007	Total	2008
Australia	19	13	11	43	25
Bahamas	0	1	0	1	
Brunei	0	0	0	0	0
Canada	25	27	25	77	27
Cyprus	0	0	1	1	1
Malta	1	2	2	5	1
New Zealand	5	11	6	22	9
Singapore	1	2	1	4	2
Total	51	56	46	153	66

(c) On Award

	2005	2006	2007
Australia	45	30	27
Bahamas	0	1	1
Brunei	0	0	0
Canada	46	47	44
Cyprus	1	2	1
Malta	1	0	2
New Zealand	16	22	14
Singapore	2	4	4
Total	111	106	93

2. FCO-funded Chevening Awards

	Fellows	Central Joint Funding	Core Awards		
	2005-06	2005-06	2005-06	2006-07	2007-08
Australia	14	0	14	7	6
Bahamas	0	0	1	1	1
Brunei	0	0	4	3	2
Canada	0	9	11	9	6
Cyprus	0	0	9	6	2
Malta	0	0	11	9	5
New Zealand	0	4	2	2	0
Singapore	2	1	5	5	4
Eight Countries	16 (7.7)	14 (2.9)	57 (4.7)	42 (3.5)	26 (2.4)
Rest of CW	48 (23.1)	106 (22.3)	253 (21.1)	271 (22.3)	229 (21.3)
Foreign Countries	144 (69.2)	356 (74.8)	892 (74.2)	901 (74.2)	817 (76.2)
TOTAL	208 (100)	476 (100)	1202 (100)	1214 (100)	1072 (100)

3. CSFP Awards in the UK 2007/08

On Award 2007/08

Scheme	Total
GS - General Scholarships (FCO)	93
GS - General Scholarships (DFID)	419
CD - Distance Learning Scholarships (DFID)	806
CF - Commonwealth Fellowships (DFID)	60
CP - Professional Fellowships (DFID)	58
Total	1436

2007 Awards

Scheme	Total
GS - General Scholarships (FCO)	46
GS - General Scholarships (DFID)	195
CD - Distance Learning Scholarships (DFID)	285
CF - Commonwealth Fellowships (DFID)	55
CP - Professional Fellowships (DFID)	63
Total	654

4. UK Award Holders Currently Overseas

Country	Currently On Award	Award Ended, Deferment Granted to Complete Course	Total
Canada	20	11	31
India	1	0	1
Jamaica	1	0	1
Malaysia	1	0	1
New Zealand	13	0	13
Total	36	11	47

ANNEX 2

Agreed General Principles of the Commonwealth Scholarship and Fellowship Plan

The General Principles underlying the Plan were agreed as follows:

- The Plan should be additional to, and distinct from, any other plan already in operation.
- The Plan should be based on mutual co-operation and sharing of educational experience among all the countries of the Commonwealth.
- The Plan should be sufficiently flexible to take account of the diverse and changing needs of the countries of the Commonwealth.
- While the Plan will be Commonwealth-wide, it will have to be operated on the basis of a series of bilateral arrangements to allow for the necessary flexibility.
- The awards should be designed to recognise and promote the highest standards of intellectual achievement as well as of technical and professional performance and have regard to any expressed manpower or development needs of nominating countries.