

Interim report on the activities of the Commonwealth Scholarship and Fellowship Plan 2023-24

The Commonwealth Scholarship and Fellowship Plan (CSFP) is a unique international framework enabling Commonwealth countries to offer university scholarships and fellowships to citizens of other member nations. Since its founding in 1959, the CSFP has forged lasting links across the Commonwealth and created life-changing educational opportunities for more than 38,000 individuals who have in turn gone on to transform their communities, societies, and nations, helping to create a fairer, safer, healthier, and more connected Commonwealth.

At the 21CCEM in Kenya in 2022, Education Ministers reaffirmed their commitment to the CSFP in the official Communique stating, 'We recognise the achievements of the Commonwealth Scholarship and Fellowship Plan (CSFP) which celebrated its 60th anniversary in 2019 and look forward to its continued strengthening'. This interim report, published in the Plan's 65th Anniversary year, details the scholarships that have been awarded in the period 2021 – 2023 and updates Ministers on the status of the recommendations made by the CSFP Taskforce.

Key points

- Commonwealth Scholarships continue to be a valuable investment in the future of the Commonwealth and provide a significant contribution to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals.
- Ministers are asked to reaffirm the support of their national governments for the CSFP.
- Member governments are asked to actively support the growth and continued future of the CSFP in two key ways:
 - by contributing to the CSFP endowment fund.
 - by hosting scholarships within their countries under the CSFP brand, or co-branding existing awards offered to Commonwealth citizens in support of the CSFP.

Overview

Commonwealth Scholarships yield profound and life-changing benefits for individuals, institutions, and countries of the Commonwealth. They build global networks of colleagues and collaborators that transcend national and disciplinary boundaries to tackle global and local challenges. They raise the profile of Commonwealth universities and promote new opportunities for partnership. They equip individuals with vital skills and knowledge, strengthening capacity and research – both in the institutions that host them and to the countries to which they return. They build lasting understanding between Commonwealth nations, thanks to the positive associations, cultural understanding, and people-to-people links that the scholarship experience creates.

Under the CSFP framework, Commonwealth Scholarships are funded in two ways:

- **Through the CSFP endowment fund;** a central fund owned by and for Commonwealth governments. The fund, which has received donations from 14 Commonwealth governments to date, currently stands at £18.6M. It supports the Queen Elizabeth Commonwealth Scholarships (QECS), which enable Commonwealth students to study at universities in low- and middle-income countries. The QECS awards are a symbolic reflection of equality among Commonwealth member states, affirming the valuable contribution to education that each nation can make.
- **By individual governments and universities in the Commonwealth;** for study within those countries or institutions. All Commonwealth governments can host Commonwealth Scholarships under an established Commonwealth brand, building networks, sharing knowledge, and strengthening higher education systems;
- Additionally, where Commonwealth governments offer existing scholarships to citizens of the Commonwealth under their own national brands, these can be co-labelled or badged as CSFP under the CSFP cooperation mechanism without diluting the primary national scholarship branding.

As you gather for the 22CCEM, Ministers are asked to consider the funding mechanisms above and to reassert your commitment to the Commonwealth Scholarship and Fellowship Plan.

The CSFP in numbers 2021 – 2023

2,095 individuals from across the Commonwealth have benefitted from the opportunity to study on a Commonwealth Scholarship or Fellowship under the framework of the plan in the period 2021 – 2023.

19 Commonwealth countries and territories have hosted awards in this period. While the United Kingdom continues to host the largest number of awards, a wider range of countries were able to participate as hosts through the CSFP endowment fund's Queen Elizabeth Commonwealth Scholarship scheme. Table 1 shows the countries who have hosted awards in this period. Please note that the numbers in this interim report are provisional at this time.

Table 1: Commonwealth Scholarships and Fellowships 2021-2023, by host country and year¹

Host Country	2021/2022	2022/2023	2023/2024	Total
Bangladesh	1	1	1	3
Eswatini	1		1	2
Fiji		1	1	2
Ghana	1	1	1	3
Gibraltar	2			2
India	8			8
Jamaica		1		1
Kenya	2	1		3
Malaysia	2	1	1	4
Mauritius	1	1		2
Pakistan	1	1	1	3
Papua New Guinea	1			1
Rwanda	1			1
South Africa	3	1	2	6
Sri Lanka	2	2	2	6
Tanzania	1	1	1	3
Trinidad and Tobago	1		1	2
Uganda		1		1
United Kingdom	715	670	657	2,042
Total	743	683	669	2,095

Citizens of 41 Commonwealth countries and territories were awarded Commonwealth Scholarships under the CSFP during 2021 - 2023. Table 2 details the citizenship of award holders during this reporting period.

Table 2: Commonwealth Scholars and Fellows 2021-2023, by home country and year

Home Country	2021/2022	2022/2023	2023/2024	Total
Antigua and Barbuda	2	1		3
Australia			1	1
Bangladesh	42	47	29	118
Belize	2	1	2	5
Botswana		1	3	4
Cameroon	18	21	17	56
Canada	1		2	3
Cyprus	1			1
Eswatini	6	2	1	9
Fiji	1	1	3	5
Ghana	70	50	57	177
Grenada		2		2

¹ Please note that the numbers in this interim report are provisional as final confirmation of award numbers are still being received.

Home Country	2021/2022	2022/2023	2023/2024	Total
Guyana	9	1		10
India	91	81	77	249
Jamaica	2		5	7
Kenya	58	75	62	195
Kiribati			1	1
Lesotho	3	3	3	9
Malawi	33	23	26	82
Malaysia	2	2		4
Maldives	1	1	1	3
Mauritius	2	1	2	5
Montserrat	1			1
Mozambique	3	5	2	10
Namibia	8		2	10
Nigeria	182	154	131	467
Pakistan	55	44	63	162
Papua New Guinea		1	1	2
Rwanda	10	5	14	29
Saint Lucia	2		1	3
Saint Vincent and The Grenadines	1		2	3
Sierra Leone	6	13	13	32
Solomon Islands		3		3
South Africa	12	10	8	30
Sri Lanka	17	7	13	37
Tanzania	14	21	33	68
The Gambia	5	10	8	23
Tonga		1		1
Uganda	55	73	64	192
Zambia	28	23	22	73
Total	743	683	669	2,095

Development of the CSFP

For the past seven years, the activities of the CSFP have been steered by the recommendations of the CSFP Taskforce – an international group of experts who looked at how this valuable scheme could be reinvigorated and expanded. The CSFP Taskforce endorsed the expansion of the CSFP and set out a number of recommendations aimed at defining, managing, and promoting Commonwealth Scholarships and Fellowships, in addition to ensuring their recognition as a prominent Commonwealth activity. These recommendations and their status are outlined below.

It is anticipated that there will be an opportunity alongside the 23CCEM to refresh the strategic priorities of the CSFP, building on the recommendations below.

Recommendations

Status

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1. Defining Commonwealth Scholarships

1.1. The five founding principles of the CSFP should be reviewed.

The CSFP management unit has been tasked with reviewing the founding principles. This will be undertaken as part of the 23CCEM.

1.2. The ability to offer Commonwealth Scholarships should be extended to individual universities, as well as governments.

The ability to offer Commonwealth Scholarships has been extended to individual universities, as well as governments. Governments are required to endorse any CSFP scholarship offering by individual universities.

1.3. Consideration should be given to a clear set of defining characteristics to establish what constitutes a Commonwealth Scholarship.

The CSFP management unit will develop a proposal for the defining characteristics, in consultation with key stakeholders. This will be undertaken as part of the 23CCEM.

1.4. Particular attention should be given to preserving awards for citizens of developed, as well as developing countries.

Work on further expansion of the CSFP endowment fund is a priority to support the continuation of scholarship support for students from developed as well as developing countries as higher income Commonwealth countries focus their awards on lower income country recipients. The United Kingdom scheme (CSC) reintroduced awards for high-income Commonwealth Countries in 2023.

2. Managing Commonwealth Scholarships

2.1. A small management unit should be established to oversee future management and promotion of the CSFP, and the Association of Commonwealth Universities should be invited to host this.

The ACU has expanded its provision of management of the CSFP endowment fund introducing a new team dedicated to administering the QECS within a Commonwealth Scholarships unit which includes the Secretariat of the United Kingdom scheme (CSC). A new evaluation framework has been developed to demonstrate the impact of the QECS programme.

2.2. A new role description should be devised for national nominating agencies.

The CSFP management unit has been tasked with consulting with national nominating agencies on establishing the appropriate working relationships noting that many CSFP awards no longer use the nominating agency system.

2.3. Consideration should be given to a relaunch of the Commonwealth Fellowships brand.

Commonwealth Fellowships are offered by the CSC in the UK. The CSFP management unit will undertake further scoping work on the distinctive objectives and benefits of Commonwealth Fellowships.

3. Promoting Commonwealth Scholarships

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3.1. Commonwealth Scholarships should be listed and marketed in a single place.

A dedicated CSFP webpage on the ACU website highlights the countries hosting their own scholarships as well as the QECS.

3.2. The CSFP should adopt a clear strategy to mark its 60th anniversary.

Various activities were undertaken as part of the CSFP's 60th anniversary including a high-profile event in December 2019 hosted by the High Commission of the Republic of Cyprus in London, attended by High Commissioners, UK parliamentarians, and Commonwealth university leaders, as well as Commonwealth Scholars past and present.

4. *Official recognition of the CSFP*

4.1. The Commonwealth Secretary-General should be asked to make a clear statement emphasising the support of the 'official' Commonwealth for the CSFP, and the practical ways in which engagement with take place.

Ministers, and the Secretary General are requested to re-affirm their support of the CSFP at this CCEM.

4.2. Time should be found at the 20th Conference of Commonwealth Education Ministers for a debate on the future of the CSFP, at which national governments are asked to formally reaffirm their support for the Plan.

Ministers at the 21CCEM reaffirmed their support for the CSFP and asked member states to contribute further to the CSFP endowment.

4.3. The reinvigoration of the CSFP should be marked with a special conference on 'Scholarships and the Commonwealth'.

The CSFP management unit are exploring the options for holding a conference on 'Scholarships and the Commonwealth' alongside the 23CCEM.