

Session 9: Plenary Session

Title: Consultative Session on Accessing Funds: EU, NGOs, charities and the private sector

Chair: Professor George Eshiwani, Vice-Chancellor, Kenyatta University, Kenya

Panel Members: Dr Andreas Mallouppas, Director, Service for Research, International and Public Relations, University of Cyprus

Ms Clare Matterson, Director of Medicine, Society and History, Wellcome Trust, UK

Dr David Strangway, President and Chief Executive Officer, Canada Foundation for Innovation

Dr Roger Svensson, Managing Director, Swedish Foundation for International Co-operation in Research and Higher Education (STINT)

Rapporteur: Dr Jonathan Nicholls, Registrar, University of Warwick

1. The Chair apologised that Dr Bill Saint, Principal Education Specialist, Africa Region, The World Bank, had been unable to join the Conference and participate in the Panel discussion.
2. **Dr Strangway** gave an account of the formation of the Canada Foundation for Innovation that is independent of government and part of a series of initiatives that have made a significant investment in Canadian higher education in recent years. The Foundation has been given a remit until 2010 (with funding worth Canadian \$4bn in the period). Since the Foundation only provides 40% of any proposal, it will lever significant new funds for capital investments in research in the next decade. Of the various schemes run by the Foundation, its International Joint Venture Fund and International Access Fund may be significant in the wider Commonwealth context. There is no restriction on the partners that Canadian institutions may involve in their strategies for submission to the Foundation.
3. **Dr Mallouppas** gave an account of the lessons the University of Cyprus had learnt in accessing research and project funds from the EU and elsewhere. He made the point that a good idea was not enough in itself. The University had worked hard at accessing information in advance of announcements of new funding initiatives so that it could anticipate how to respond. Personal contacts within the EU had been invaluable. The EU encouraged the formation of networks for research and the University had taken advantage of this to prepare itself for funding opportunities. It had invested in an office structure to help form the partnerships and prepare research

bids. It recognised that a successful bid had to meet the agenda of the funding body, be professionally prepared and contain the right messages. Good science was often not enough. It was also sometimes necessary to provide seed money, contacts for co-funding or an investment by the University. While recognising that this might be a difficulty for developing countries, Dr Mallouppas thought that the ACU could help by providing the kind of office and advice infrastructure he had described to support the bids of universities to various bodies.

4. **Ms Matterson** gave an account of the rapid growth of the Wellcome trust in the 1980s and 1990s to the point where it now had c.£13bn of assets, making it one of the largest trusts in the world. It had recently agreed a five-year strategic plan to foster and promote research to improve animal and human health and was looking to spend £550m a year to deliver the plan's objectives. It was focusing on four main areas: Enhancing the Knowledge Base; Resources; Translation (i.e. knowledge transfer); and Public Engagement in Science. Information about its plans in these areas was available from the Wellcome's website (www.wellcome.ac.uk). Under the agreed plan, 40% of funds would support responsive mode baseline research and 55% fixed term funding (the remaining 5% administrative and running costs). 85% of the funds would be spent in the UK and 15% internationally. It was a priority of the Trust to look internationally for clinical work and to promote public engagement in and understanding of science. Ms Matterson also reflected on the recent explosion in the number of trusts, which was the greatest since the post-industrial phase of trust development. Fortunes made in IT and related industries were now creating new opportunities (e.g. The Gates Foundation). Indeed, the Rockefeller Foundation (now a relatively small trust in comparison with recent foundations) was running workshops on philanthropy for those who wished to donate their money for specific causes.
5. **Dr Svensson** described the work of STINT which had been founded by the Swedish government in 1994 and had assets of c.\$3.5bn. Sweden spent 4% of its GDP on Research and Development and the Foundation played an important role in this investment. STINT had funds for the mobility of scholars either to or from Sweden. Of particular interest to ACU might be its visiting scientists scheme which funded 35-50 people a year. In addition, there were currently about 100 joint projects between Swedish and overseas groups, which involved a range of scholars of varying seniority. STINT also funded scholarships for Master's level students to come to Sweden to programmes taught in English. A mark of the success of these was that about 25% then stayed on to follow a PhD programme. Finally, there was a teaching excellence programme for scholars both to and from Sweden. In Dr Svensson's view, application to STINT was less complicated than to the EU programmes. It was necessary for an applicant to link to a Swedish institution or research group and the formation of new linkages and networks was a principal objective of STINT. On the question of foundations generally, Dr Svensson saw these as increasingly important levers of change as pressure mounts on government funds. Finding ways of accessing grants from foundations would be a key issue for all scholars and universities in the future.

In the ensuing discussion, the following points were made:

- i. UK universities acknowledged the increasing shift from government to foundation funding but pointed out that this was not without its problems - not least of which were the unwillingness of charitable foundations to pay for the indirect costs or overheads of the research they were funding. This caused funding distortions in universities. It was noted that the Canadian situation was similar but that there were some hopes that this problem was being addressed in some schemes. Ms Matterson reminded the conference that Wellcome was in discussion about these issues with government and Universities UK; but its current view was that it entered into partnership with universities and the indirect costs were part of the universities' contribution to that.
- ii. A number of concerns were expressed from developing countries about the cuts in international aid budgets for research and scholarship and the difficulties that they faced in accessing the kinds of funds that the session had described. There was a sense that the potential in developing countries was not fully recognised and that they were excluded from the kinds of major foundation- and government-funded programmes which were the subject of the session. Indeed, what was witnessed was the growing prosperity of the research base in developed countries at the expense of the developing world and its talent which was being drained away to work elsewhere. A more honest attitude was required from some agencies about whether applications from the developing world were welcome or possible.
- iii. In response to this, there was a view that the ACU should do more to synthesise the mass of information that now existed on funding opportunities and make this available on a more systematic basis to its members with an advisory service. IT could be a great help here. It was pointed out, however, that information on its own was not enough. It needed to be sifted and discrimination used so that the right information was available to the right people. There were such proprietary software and subscription schemes now available that were used by many universities. Nonetheless this was clearly something that the ACU could consider. It was also argued that the ACU might consider establishing some kind of seed fund for new research opportunities. However, it was also strongly noted that universities themselves had to see this as a strategic priority and devote resources accordingly. It needed commitment and professionalism from them.

In conclusion, the members of the panel made the following points:

- i. Dr Svensson agreed that peer review groups had to be encouraged to back potential not just established researchers. He pointed out that bidders to any fund had to understand the political agenda behind its establishment and make a case, which was consonant with the purposes of the fund as well as containing a good project. STINT needed bids which were made in collaboration with Swedish

institutions. If these connections could be made then it would fund more projects that involved overseas universities.

- ii. Ms Matterson was pleased that some members felt that Wellcome was indeed welcoming. It was interested in building the capacity to enable its research objectives to be met. Collaborative funding through the Trust had and would continue to help countries around the world. She made reference to an Academy of Health Philanthropy that had been established in the USA to pull together sources of funding and knowledge: this too might be of interest to ACU members.
- iii. Dr Mallouppas stressed that universities themselves must put in the effort and investment to find ways into the funding organisations. His University had started by "finding the back door" with patience. He commended a similar approach to other members.
- iv. Dr Strangway wanted to reassure the Conference that Canada was still in the game of overseas assistance and that there was evidence that the cuts of recent years in these programmes had been arrested. His programme was a new venture. It was complementary to existing initiatives not replacements for them.