



The Association
of Commonwealth
Universities



UK International
Development

Partnership | Progress | Prosperity



Ocean Country Partnership Programme Scholarships

Final Evaluation Report September 2026

Author: Evelina Vardanyan, Senior Research, Evaluation and
Policy Officer, ACU

CONTENTS

03	Executive summary
05	Introduction
08	Methodology
11	Section 1: Scholar profile and expectations at baseline 1.1 <i>Previous scholarship experience.</i> 1.2 <i>Employment status before the award.</i> 1.3 <i>Sector of employment</i> 1.4 <i>The difference the award made</i> 1.5 <i>Development issues addressed by scholars' studies</i> 1.6 <i>How scholars planned to communicate their results</i> 1.7 <i>Expected short-term outcomes</i> 1.8 <i>Expected long-term outcomes</i>
18	Section 2: Skills and knowledge 2.1 <i>Research skills</i> 2.2 <i>Professional and leadership skills</i> 2.3 <i>Communication and impact skills</i> 2.4 <i>Community engagement and crosscutting themes</i> <i>Case study: Syed Tashfee Ul Islam, Bangladesh</i> 2.5 <i>Experience of the training modules</i> 2.6 <i>Professional network development</i>
28	Section 3: Post-scholarship employment and responsibilities 3.1 <i>Employment status and sector</i> 3.2 <i>Agency in employment</i> 3.3 <i>Employment responsibilities</i> <i>Case study: Ed'n Newfield, Belize</i>
35	Section 4: On-award research activities 4.1 <i>The research undertaken</i> 4.2 <i>How the scholarship shaped the research</i> 4.3 <i>Crosscutting themes</i> <i>Case study: Mere Yabaki-Goundar, Fiji</i>
42	Section 5: Post-scholarship research activities 5.1 <i>Authoring of papers, reports and grant applications</i> 5.2 <i>Conference attendance and organisation</i> 5.3 <i>Journal editing, steering and reviewing</i> 5.4 <i>Dissemination of on-award research</i> <i>Case study: Rachael Ackah, Ghana</i>
48	Section 6: Scholars' views of the scholarship 6.1 <i>What scholars valued most</i> 6.2 <i>Perceptions of the scholarship</i>
50	Summary and conclusions

Executive summary

The OCPP Scholarships programme, delivered by the Association of Commonwealth Universities as part of the UK Government's Ocean Country Partnership Programme, funded postgraduate study in marine science for early- and mid-career professionals across eleven countries. This evaluation draws on baseline and final evaluation surveys and four in-depth case studies. Findings describing the cohort at the outset draw on all 117 baseline respondents, while findings describing change over time draw on the 24 scholars who responded at both points. The final evaluation survey was not issued to the full baseline cohort. It was sent to the 43 scholars who had completed their studies by the time this report was prepared, and 24 responded in full, a response rate of 56% among those eligible.

Because the final survey was conducted shortly after graduation, the findings describe early outcomes: what scholars gained, where they are now, and what they have begun to do with it. Longer-term effects on institutions and marine management were not assessed and could not reasonably be assessed within the agreed evaluation timeframe.

The award provided access to postgraduate study that many could not otherwise have undertaken

Nine in ten scholars had never held a higher education scholarship before. Asked how likely they would have been to complete the same qualification without the award, the 24 scholars who answered at both points moved from a mean of 6.5 at baseline to 4.6 afterwards: having done the programme, they judged it markedly less likely they could have done it otherwise. Scholars' own accounts were direct, several stating they could not have afforded postgraduate study at all.

Research capability was the clearest gain

Every respondent reported improvements in designing and conducting research, analysing data and academic writing. Two-thirds identified research design and methodology as the area where the scholarship made the biggest difference. Before their awards, most scholars had never published, never applied for research funding and held no roles in the wider research community; afterwards, 19 of 24 were publishing or preparing publications and 16 of 24 were presenting at conferences.

Scholars moved into the marine sector and stayed there

Half of the 24 respondents who completed both surveys worked in the marine environment sector before their award; afterwards 21 of 24 were engaged in it through employment, study or volunteering. No scholar who had been working in the sector before the award had left it and nine scholars entered the sector. Of those in work, 11 of 17 held leadership or management responsibilities, and almost all reported introducing new ideas, influencing decisions and sharing what they had learned with colleagues.

OCP Scholarships expanded academic and professional networks

Networking grew on almost every measure, most sharply for professional contacts in other countries, from 21% to 46%. Almost all scholars said their ability to build networks had improved, and 21 of the 22 who rated it found the scholarship valuable for this.

Applied and community-facing from the outset

Scholars framed their studies around marine pollution, sustainable seafood, biodiversity and climate change, and described applied, solution-oriented research: 79% expected to contribute to sustainable practice and resource management, and 64% to community engagement and local livelihoods. That orientation carried through the award, with the community-based participatory research module used in practice by 17 of the 20 who took it.

Where the programme is less developed

Three areas show more limited progress. Dissemination beyond academic channels such as policy briefs, work with government, media and non-governmental organisations remains largely intentional at this stage. Connections formed between scholars during the training modules had not lasted for a quarter of the cohort, despite cohort-building being an explicit aim. And while every scholar regarded the scholarships as prestigious and relevant to their country's needs, a small number doubted that employers at home recognised them.

A note on what these numbers describe

Response to the final evaluation varied considerably by country, and those who responded had entered the programme at an earlier career stage than the cohort as a whole. The findings therefore describe the final evaluation respondents rather than all scholars, and the total is stated wherever figures are given.

Introduction

Programme background

The Ocean Country Partnership Programme (OCP) is a UK Government initiative funded through Official Development Assistance as part of the Blue Planet Fund, which aims to support partner countries in addressing marine environmental challenges and strengthening sustainable ocean management. Within this wider programme, the Association of Commonwealth Universities (ACU) serves as the delivery partner for the OCP Scholarships component.

The OCP Scholarships programme provided fully funded postgraduate study opportunities in marine science and related disciplines for early- to mid-career professionals across participating countries. Delivered through partnerships with universities in Bangladesh, India, Belize, Ghana, Maldives, Mozambique, Senegal, Sri Lanka, Vanuatu, the Solomon Islands and Fiji, the scholarships were designed to strengthen national capacity by supporting individuals to develop advanced technical knowledge and research skills. A defining feature of the scheme was that most scholars studied in their own countries: host country and home country were the same for 94 of the 117 baseline respondents. The main exception is the pilot cohort, whose scholars came from several countries and studied together at the University of the South Pacific in Fiji; a small number of main-cohort scholars from the Maldives, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu were also hosted there. This in-country model shapes how the counterfactual and networking findings should be read.

The rationale for the scholarships is grounded in the recognition that many partner countries face complex and evolving marine and coastal challenges, including environmental degradation, climate change and pressures on marine resources, while also experiencing constraints in technical expertise and research capacity. Strengthening individual capability has therefore been positioned as a key entry point for supporting longer-term improvements in marine science, policy and practice.

At the same time, the scholarships represented a relatively bounded intervention within a broader programme that seeks to influence systems, institutions and environmental outcomes. While their intended contribution aligned with wider OCP objectives, such as improving evidence-based decision-making and supporting sustainable marine management, scholars' most direct sphere of influence lay at the level of participant knowledge, skills and professional development.

This distinction matters for the evaluation. As it has been conducted in parallel with the completion of the final scholarship cohorts, it has not been possible to assess longer-term impacts, particularly those relating to institutional change or environmental outcomes. The evaluation instead focuses on outcomes-level change, examining the extent to which the scholarships have contributed to changes in participant knowledge, skills and early indications of application.

The scholarships can therefore be understood as a foundational investment in human capital. While such investments are expected to contribute to broader change over time, their effects are typically mediated by external factors including labour market conditions, institutional capacity and policy environments. The evaluation adopts a proportionate approach, focusing on what can reasonably be evidenced within the available timeframe while recognising the longer-term and indirect nature of the programme's intended contributions.

Programme objectives

The OCPP aims to support partner countries in addressing key marine environmental challenges through strengthening scientific expertise, improving evidence-based decision-making and supporting sustainable management of marine resources. The programme is structured around three core thematic objectives:

- Tackling marine pollution, including improving understanding of its impacts and supporting effective responses.
- Promoting sustainable seafood practices, including strengthening management, monitoring and enforcement to improve sustainability.
- Protecting marine biodiversity, including supporting the establishment and management of marine protected areas.

Across these areas, the OCPP aims to strengthen marine science expertise, develop science-based policy and management tools, and create educational resources to support coastal communities and improve livelihoods.

The scheme's published aims are set out on the [ACU's OCPP Scholarships pages](#) and, at programme level, in the [UK Government's OCPP policy paper](#). The three objectives below are the evaluation's operational reading of those aims, framed so that findings can be reported against them. Within this framework, the OCPP Scholarships programme contributes by supporting individual-level capacity development. The overall aim is to strengthen the capacity of OCPP partner countries to address marine environmental challenges, by supporting research and innovation in areas aligned with the programme's thematic priorities. More specifically, the scholarships are intended to:

- Support the development of advanced knowledge and skills in marine science.
- Enable scholars to undertake research relevant to national and global marine priorities.
- Contribute to the generation of evidence and expertise that can inform policy, practice and sustainable resource management over time.

While the scholarships are expected to contribute to wider programme outcomes, their primary focus remains on building individual capacity and supporting research, with broader impacts on policy, institutions and environmental outcomes expected to emerge over a longer timeframe.

Evaluation questions

The OCPP monitoring and evaluation plan set out what the end-of-award survey would cover: the areas carried over from the baseline survey, namely academic research activities, interpersonal networks and development impact, together with new material on changes to skills and knowledge, reflections on the experience of studying including the Virtual Capacity Strengthening Programme modules, and scholars' future career plans. The evaluation questions below follow that scope and determine what is reported here. The plan does not set objectives, indicators or targets for the scholarships strand, so the evaluation questions were derived from the scheme's stated aims and from the data the plan provided for.

1. **Additionality:** to what extent did the scholarships enable postgraduate study that would not otherwise have taken place, and for scholars whose backgrounds match the needs of partner countries?
2. **Skills and knowledge:** how have scholars' skills and knowledge changed as a result of the scholarship, including through the Virtual Capacity Strengthening Programme modules?
3. **Academic research activities and dissemination:** what research have scholars undertaken, how relevant is it to national and global marine priorities and to the crosscutting themes, and are they continuing to build on it and share it with others?
4. **Interpersonal networks:** how have scholars' professional and academic connections developed through the award, and how actively are they being used?
5. **Career pathways and future plans:** where are scholars working now, are they engaged in the marine environment sector, and what are their plans for the period ahead?

Methodology

The evaluation has been designed to assess outcomes-level change, with a focus on participant learning, professional development and early indications of how knowledge and skills gained through the scholarship are being applied. This reflects both the objectives of the scholarships and the timing of the evaluation.

It draws on a combination of survey data and qualitative case studies. The primary sources are a baseline survey conducted at the start of the scholarship and a final evaluation survey administered after completion, supported by four in-depth case studies. The baseline survey provides contextual information on scholars' backgrounds, prior experience, professional roles and expectations at the outset. The final evaluation survey captures reflections on the scholarship, including perceived changes in skills and knowledge, research activities, and professional and academic trajectories following completion.

Both structured and open-ended responses inform the analysis. Qualitative data play a central role in showing how scholars describe changes in their capabilities, research engagement and career pathways and have been analysed thematically. Quantitative data have been analysed using descriptive methods, with findings presented as counts alongside percentages.

Case studies

Four scholars were selected for in-depth case studies, chosen to reflect a range of countries, research subjects and career stages across the cohort. Evidence for each was drawn from a written pre-interview questionnaire and a full recorded interview, both conducted from June to August 2026, and synthesised narratively. The case studies are illustrative rather than representative: they show in depth what the survey findings describe at cohort level and are presented as boxed features within the relevant sections.

Three of the four scholars had completed their scholarship studies at the time of interview. The fourth was still completing their award, as the only doctoral candidate among the case study scholars undertaking a PhD as part of the pilot cohort. This case study is accordingly framed around progress and trajectory rather than realised outcomes. All four scholars consented to being named.

Survey coverage and denominators

The baseline survey was completed by 117 scholars, 16 from the pilot cohort and 101 from the main cohort, across eleven countries.

The final evaluation survey was completed by 24 scholars from five countries, all of whom also completed the baseline survey, so before-and-after comparison is possible for the full set of final-survey respondents.

Two denominators are therefore used throughout: findings describing the cohort at the outset draw on all 117 baseline respondents, while findings describing change over time draw on the 24 scholars who responded at both points. Two scholars did not answer the two open questions about expected outcomes, so those subsections reflect 115 responses. The denominator is stated wherever figures are reported, and counts are given alongside percentages because the totals involved are small.

Given the small numbers involved, country-level figures are reported only where the difference between countries is material to the finding, and the total is stated alongside so that the reader can judge how much weight it carries.

The final evaluation survey was not issued to the full baseline cohort. It was sent to the 43 scholars who had completed their studies by the time this report was prepared, in two rounds of invitations issued as successive groups finished, and 24 responded in full, a response rate of 56% among those eligible. Responses from the two rounds are analysed together, as the questions and response options were identical.

Response rates varied considerably by country. Every scholar invited from Belize and Ghana responded, as did around six in ten of those from India, while fewer than a third of the Bangladeshi scholars did so. Bangladesh accounts for over a third of those invited but around a fifth of the responses, while Belize and Ghana are proportionally better represented among respondents than among invitees. Findings therefore lean towards the experience of scholars in the countries that responded most fully, and this should be borne in mind wherever results are read as describing the cohort as a whole.

Home country	Invited	Responded	Response rate	% of invited	% of respondents
India	18	11	61%	42%	46%
Bangladesh	16	5	31%	37%	21%
Belize	4	4	100%	9%	17%
Ghana	3	3	100%	7%	13%
Solomon Islands	2	1	50%	5%	4%
Total	43	24	56%	100%	100%

Table 1 Final evaluation survey invitations and responses, by home country. This table describes survey coverage only. Percentages are rounded and may not sum exactly to 100.

A note on language: the baseline survey was completed in English, French or Portuguese, and the French and Portuguese responses were machine-translated using Microsoft Copilot for analysis. Translated open-text responses are used for their general sense only and are not quoted verbatim. All 24 scholars in the matched final-evaluation group completed the baseline in English, so no translated material is quoted anywhere in this report; the caveat applies only to the full-baseline context figures drawn from the wider cohort.

A note on the use of AI: Microsoft Copilot was used to support analysis and drafting. All figures were checked against source by the author, who is responsible for the interpretation and conclusions.

Scope and interpretation

Three limitations should be borne in mind. First, the final evaluation survey covers the 24 scholars who responded of the 43 eligible, and response rates differed markedly between countries, so the findings describe those respondents rather than the scholar cohort as a whole. Second, outcomes are self-reported. Self-reported change can be influenced by how scholars recall their starting point and tends to be more positive than an independent measure would be. Third, the evaluation has no comparison group, so the analysis speaks to the scholarships' contribution to observed changes rather than establishing attribution.

Given the objectives and scope of the evaluation, the analysis focuses on participant-level outcomes, particularly skills development, research engagement and early application of learning. While the scholarships are intended to contribute to broader programme goals, these effects are expected to emerge over longer timeframes and are not directly assessed here.

Section 1: Scholar profile and expectations at baseline

This section describes who the OCPP scholars were when they took up their awards and what they expected the scholarship to achieve. It draws on the baseline survey, completed by all 117 scholars, and for the counterfactual question, on the final evaluation survey of the 24 scholars who responded at both points. Two scholars did not answer the two open questions about expected outcomes, so those subsections rest on 115 responses.

1.1 Previous scholarship experience

The vast majority of OCPP scholars were first-time scholarship awardees, with 88% reporting that they had never previously been selected for a higher education scholarship. India was an outlier in this regard: 6 of the 18 Indian scholars (33%) had previously received a scholarship, a higher share than in any other country in the cohort.

1.2 Employment status before the award

Prior to taking up their scholarship, most OCPP scholars were employed (43%) or studying (39%). Only 14% of awardees were not in education, employment or training at the time of their application. A further 4% were both employed and studying, so 55 scholars (47%) were in work in some form when they applied. Mozambique and Ghana saw disproportionately high levels of scholars not in education, employment or training; 41% and 38% respectively (7 of 17 and 5 of 13) were in this position at the time of their application.

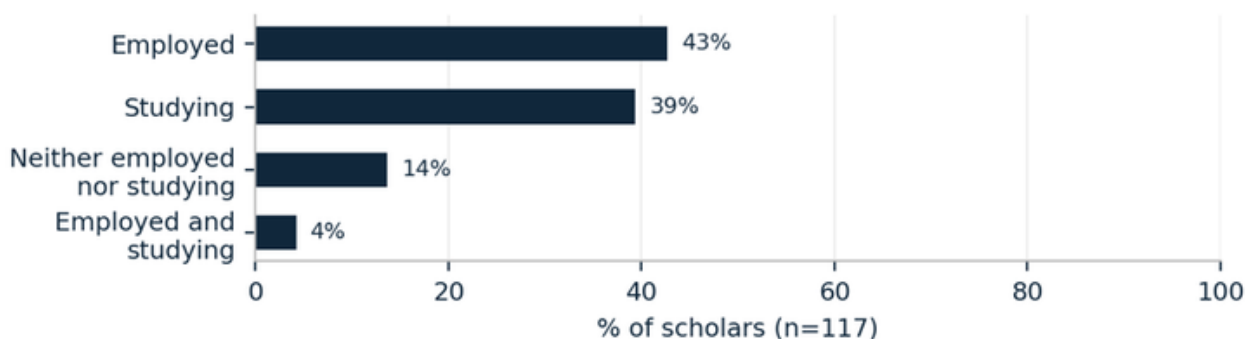


Figure 1.1 Employment status at the time of application. Total: all 117 baseline respondents.

1.3 Sector of employment

Of the 55 scholars in work when they applied, the largest groups were in the public sector working for national government (16, 29%) and in academia (15, 27%). A further 4 (7%) worked in the public sector for local or regional government, 8 (15%) for international and 4 (7%) for local non-governmental organisations, and 7 (13%) in the private sector. One scholar recorded their sector only as public, without specifying the level.

1.4 The difference the award made

OCPD scholars were asked to consider how likely they would have been to complete the same qualification if they had not received the award. Scholars responded on a 10-point Likert scale (from 1 = 'impossible' to 10 = 'definitely'). Scholars' responses to this question clustered around the poles of the scale, with close to a quarter of scholars answering 1, and a further quarter answering 10. Mean scores at baseline were similar across the three scenarios: 4.9 for studying in the host country, 5.3 for the home country and 4.5 for another country (n = 110, 87 and 117 respectively). All scholars were asked about all three scenarios, so the totals differ only because some chose not to answer scenarios that did not apply to them; most studied in their home country, which makes the host-country and home-country scenarios the same situation for all but one respondent.

'Without the scholarship, it would be impossible for me to access further education. I personally cannot afford to pay for tuition fees for the same program that I am currently enrolled in.'

OCPD scholar, baseline survey

The same question was asked again at the end of the award, allowing a direct before-and-after comparison for the 24 scholars who responded at both points. Because the scheme supported in-country study, the baseline host-country scenario and the final-survey question describe substantially the same situation for all but one of these scholars. Among this group the mean score fell from 6.5 at baseline (23 of the 24 answered this scenario at baseline) to 4.6 at final evaluation: having completed the programme, scholars judged it markedly less likely that they could have undertaken the same qualification without the scholarship. This shift is one of the clearer indications in the survey data that the award was decisive, although it also reflects scholars' improved understanding of what the programme involved.

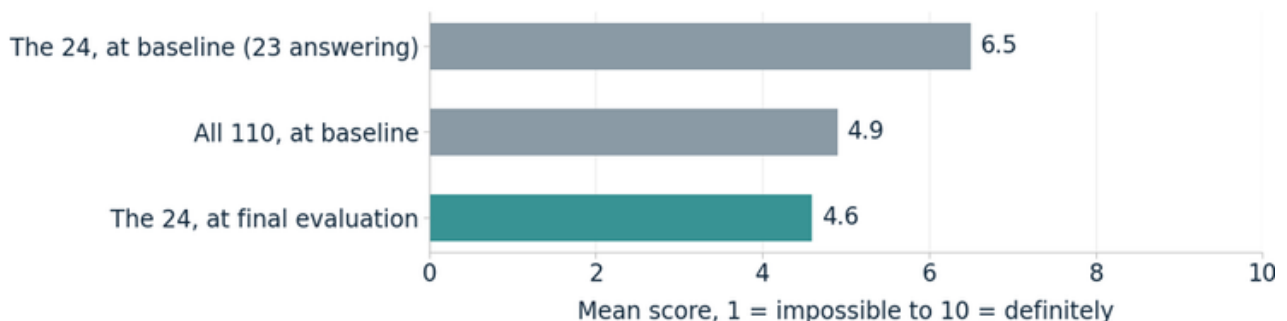


Figure 1.2 Likelihood of undertaking the same qualification without the award, host-country scenario. The 110 baseline respondents who answered this scenario are shown alongside the 24 matched scholars to keep the shift in proportion.

For representativeness, the same host-country counterfactual can be read three ways: the 24 matched scholars scored 6.5 at baseline, the 110 baseline respondents answering the host-country scenario scored 4.9, and the 24 scored 4.6 at final evaluation. The 24 who responded therefore began more confident than the cohort as a whole that they had alternatives to the award, and then fell furthest, so part of the movement from 6.5 to 4.6 reflects who responded rather than change across the whole cohort.

1.5 Development issues addressed by scholars' studies

Across the full baseline cohort, scholars framed their studies around four marine development issues and could select more than one. Biodiversity was the most widely selected (76 scholars), followed closely by climate change and sustainable seafood (66 each) and marine pollution (65); 84 of the 117 selected two or more issues, indicating that most scholars saw their work sitting across several linked marine challenges. When asked to name a single primary issue, marine pollution came first (39, 33%), then sustainable seafood (30, 26%), biodiversity (27, 23%) and climate change (21, 18%). Self-chosen keywords reinforced this spread: conservation, biodiversity, sustainability, climate change and marine pollution were the most frequent, with more specific concerns such as mangroves, microplastics, coral reefs, food security and antimicrobial resistance recurring beneath them.

Scholars also identified the crosscutting themes their research engaged, most often economic shocks (61) and gender and vulnerable groups (50), with most selecting two.

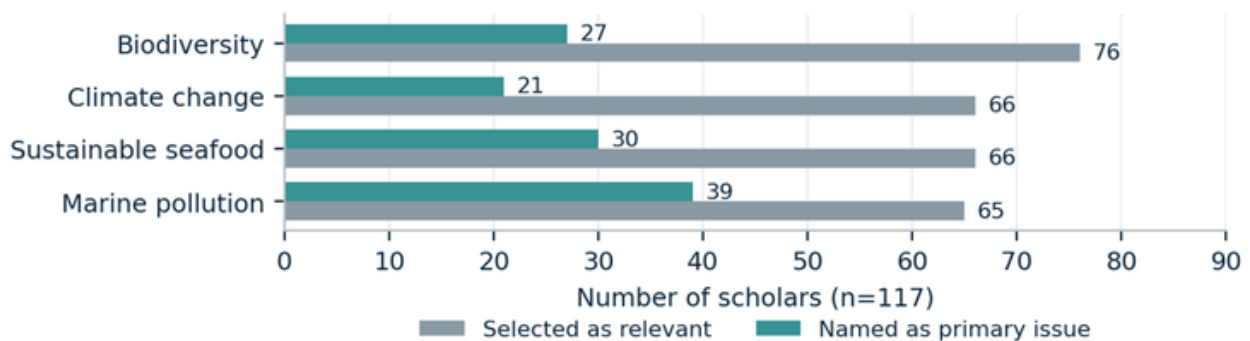


Figure 1.3 Marine development issues selected as relevant and named as the single primary issue. Total: all 117 baseline respondents; scholars could select more than one issue as relevant.

On how their objectives would address these issues, scholars consistently described applied, solution-oriented research. Coded across the problem, proposed-solution and expected-impact fields, the most frequently named mechanism was improving sustainable practice, conservation and resource management (92 scholars, 79%), followed by community engagement and support for local livelihoods (75, 64%) and generating evidence to inform policy, legislation and management decisions (66, 56%); awareness-raising and capacity-building featured less often (44, 38%).

These categories overlap since a single response often combined several of them, but together they show a cohort framing its studies around tangible marine-management outcomes. These were open questions, and the responses were coded thematically for this analysis.

'Establishing an effective and implementable community based resource management options and regulations through community fisheries management plans would be appropriate to address the seafood shortages, improved nutrition and improved livelihoods.'

OCPD scholar, baseline survey

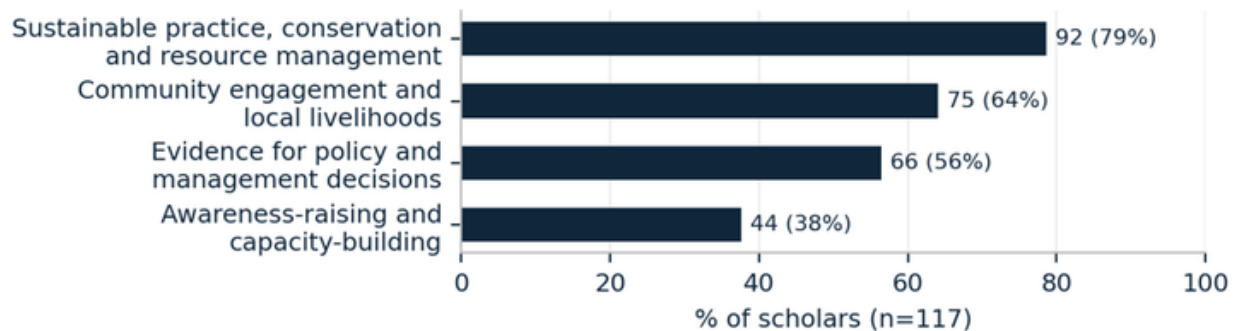


Figure 1.4 Mechanisms by which scholars expected their studies to address their development issue, coded from free-text responses. Responses could name more than one mechanism, so percentages do not sum to 100.

1.6 How scholars planned to communicate their results

That applied orientation carried through to dissemination intent. Asked how they would communicate the results of their study, scholars pointed most often to community and local audiences (97, 83%), with academic channels such as conferences and journals (77, 66%), workshops and training (75, 64%) and government and policymakers (63, 54%) also widely cited, and the private sector least (37, 32%).

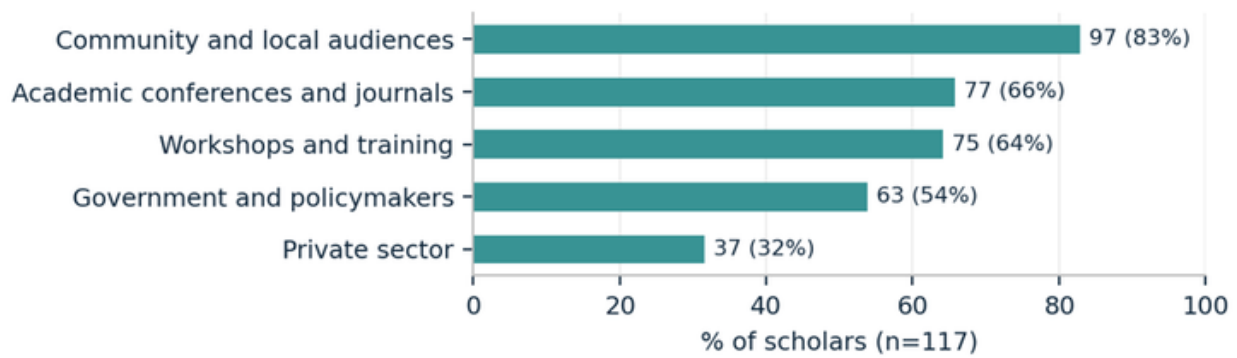


Figure 1.5 Audiences and channels scholars planned to use to communicate their results, coded from free-text responses. Total: all 117 baseline respondents; responses could name more than one audience.

'I like to communicate the results with the local community and government. Because I think the government can take the necessary initiatives and I can share the results using accessible language, group discussion, and research articles.'
OCPP scholar, baseline survey

What scholars went on to research on award is examined in Section 4, and the dissemination channels used in Section 5.

1.7 Expected short-term outcomes

Prior to the start of their scholarship, award holders were asked what they expected the short-term outcomes of their OCPP Scholarship to be, and 115 of the 117 scholars responded to this open question, which was coded thematically. Most framed their response in terms of what they would learn: 49% expected to gain subject knowledge and skills in their field, by some distance the most common expectation and one often expressed in general terms of deepening expertise. Professional networking followed at 30%, with scholars anticipating connections to other scholars, mentors and professionals in marine science. Immediate financial relief was named by 27%, several describing how the removal of financial pressure would let them concentrate on their studies, and a further 20% pointed to the access the award gave them to resources, equipment and training they could not otherwise reach.

'Short term outcomes from this scholarship is financial relief while I continue to further my education. I can focus on my academic performance and worry less about financial burden.'
OCPP scholar, baseline survey

More specific academic expectations were also common. Research skills and methods were named by 17%, and the same proportion expected to begin a research project or publish from it, while 10% singled out academic writing and communication. Completing the qualification itself was named by 15% and improved employability or career prospects by 13%. Smaller numbers mentioned increased confidence or motivation (8%), and only 2% expected to apply their learning directly in their workplace, unsurprising given that most scholars were about to begin full-time study.

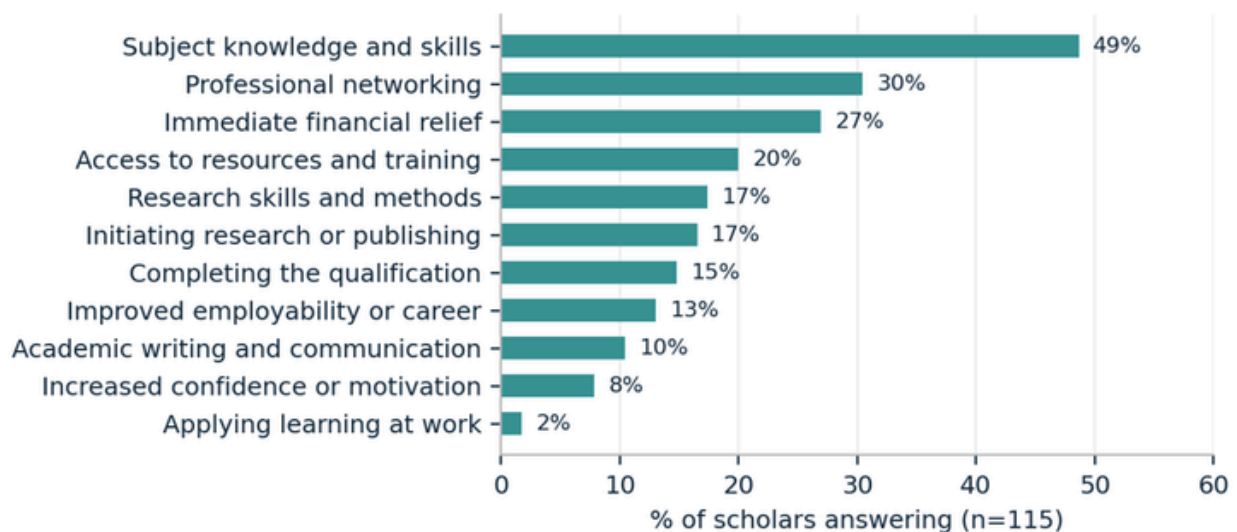


Figure 1.6 Expected short-term outcomes of the scholarship. Total 115 scholars answering. Responses could carry more than one theme, so percentages do not sum to 100.

1.8 Expected long-term outcomes

Asked what they expected the most significant long-term outcomes to be, the same 115 scholars looked well beyond the award itself. The most frequently cited outcome was the development of a research career: 40% expected the scholarship to establish them as researchers in their field, whether by building a body of published work, taking on senior research roles or becoming a recognised specialist in a marine subject. Improved career prospects more generally followed at 22%, with scholars describing better positions, professional recognition and wider opportunities without tying these to a particular sector.

'The most significant long-term outcome from this scholarship will be the ability to conduct better research and translate said research into policy change and decision-making processes.'

OCCP scholar, baseline survey

Applied marine work featured strongly: 20% expected to contribute to sustainable fishing and marine resource management, and 17% to conservation and biodiversity protection, with smaller numbers pointing to waste management (3%) or to project implementation in general (4%). Academic pathways were also prominent, with 15% intending to progress to PhD study and 14% anticipating a career in academia. Beyond this, 12% expected to shape policy and decision-making in their home country, and 6% anticipated leadership or senior government roles. Only 3% named completion of the qualification itself as a significant long-term outcome, a marked contrast with their short-term expectations, where finishing the degree and securing financial relief featured much more heavily.

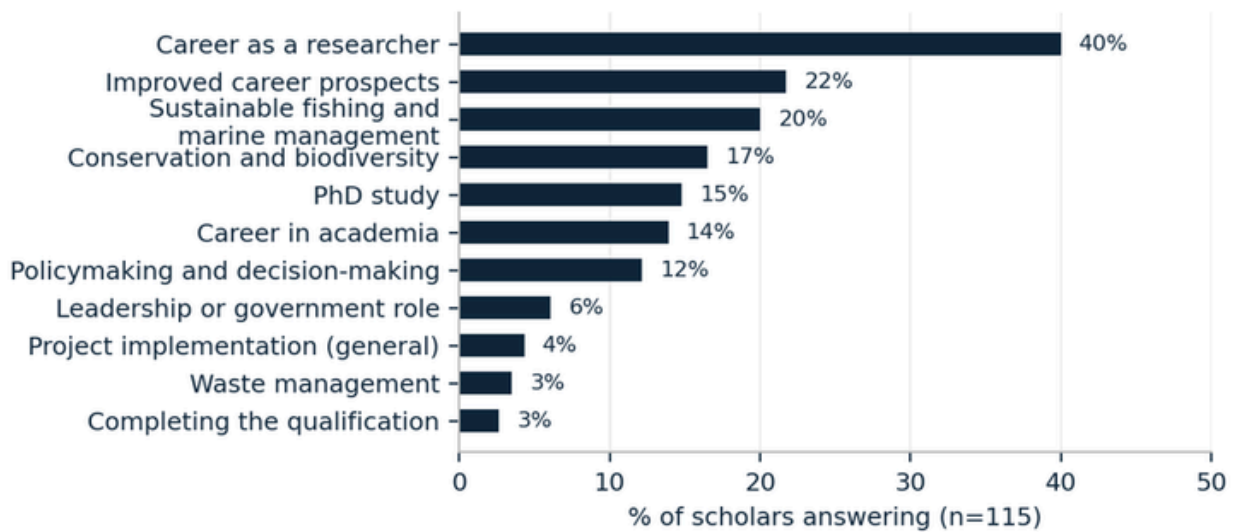


Figure 1.7 Expected long-term outcomes of the scholarship. Total 115 scholars answering. Responses could carry more than one theme, so percentages do not sum to 100.

The two questions show scholars with immediate expectations from the award centred on knowledge, skills and the financial room to study; their longer view was concentrated on becoming established researchers and applying that expertise to the marine challenges facing their own countries.

Section 2: Skills and knowledge

This section addresses the evaluation question of what skills and knowledge scholars gained through the OCPP Scholarship. It draws on the baseline survey of 117 scholars and the final evaluation survey of 24 graduates, all of whom were matched to their baseline responses. Where the two surveys asked the same question on the same scale, changes are reported directly; where they did not, each is reported on its own terms, and the basis is stated. The subsections below deal in turn with research skills, professional and leadership skills, communication and impact skills, community engagement and crosscutting themes, experience of the training modules, and professional network development.

2.1 Research skills

At baseline, the holding of formal roles in the research community was limited among the 41 scholars routed to these questions. These questions were asked only of the 64 scholars who were employed or recently employed at application, and then only of those who said that conducting research was a main part of their job, which is why they rest on 41 rather than 117. Few held academic journal roles: 3 were editors or steering-committee members, 4 were peer reviewers and 10 had organised a research group or conference committee. Cross-border research collaboration was uncommon: most had never co-authored a paper with someone outside their home country (26 of 41), never co-authored a grant application abroad (31) and never attended an overseas research conference (29). Evidence of research outputs was similarly thin: 35 of 41 had never or rarely published a journal article and 34 had never or rarely applied for research funding, although a slim majority (23 of 41) were often or always involved in research projects. The baseline picture is of scholars active inside research projects but rarely publishing, securing funding or holding formal positions in the wider research community.

By the final evaluation, the 24 graduates described a markedly more research-active profile. Nearly all were conducting research (21 of 24), and self-assessed research skills were near-universal: every respondent agreed their ability to design and conduct research, analyse and interpret data, and write structured, evidence-based academic work had improved, and 23 of 24 respondents reported stronger professional networks. Formal positions in the wider research community, by contrast, remained uncommon at this stage. The evidence suggests an immediate impact on individual research capabilities. Further analyses exploring research dissemination and professional development opportunities are reported in Sections 5.1-5.4.

'The scholarship significantly improved my research approach by helping me strengthen my research design, data collection, and analytical skills. It also enhanced my academic writing style and helped me present findings more clearly and professionally.'

OCPP scholar, baseline survey

2.2 Professional and leadership skills

Before their award, scholars' professional and leadership activity was uneven. Leading new work was far from universal: across the full baseline cohort, 37% often or always led or designed a new initiative or project (43 of 117), while leading a funding or investment bid was rarer still, with 70% having never done so (78 of 111). Among the 64 scholars employed or recently employed at application who answered the workplace-context questions (55 in work at application and a further 9 recently employed), most described a supportive and autonomous environment: 88% often or always had a voice in how they did their job (56 of 64) and in what happened in their team (56 of 64), and clear majorities found managers (73%) and co-workers (81%) supportive when they suggested new practices. However, only just over half (55%) felt their organisation had the resources to act on the ideas they raised.

At the final evaluation, graduates consistently reported stronger professional skills: all 24 respondents agreed their ability to develop innovative solutions to complex problems, to plan and manage long-term projects and to work effectively in teams had improved since the scholarship, and 22 of 24 reported managing deadlines and competing priorities more effectively. How often graduates were able to put that learning to use in the workplace by introducing ideas, influencing decisions, leading initiatives and mentoring colleagues is reported in Section 3.2, and the responsibilities and positions they hold in Section 3.3.

2.3 Communication and impact skills

The final evaluation was conducted shortly after graduation, when scholars had had little opportunity to generate real-world impact. The baseline instead recorded where scholars expected their work to make a difference, and the final evaluation focused on the communication and application skills they took from the programme. The two are read together as a forward baseline of intent and a post-award assessment of capability, with realised impact a question for longer-term follow-up.

At baseline, scholars mostly anticipated impact at local (98 of 117, 84%) and institutional (91, 78%) levels, half at national level (58, 50%) and only around a quarter internationally (27, 23%). By area, impact was most often expected in social development (88, 75%) and environment or climate change (84, 72%), followed by civic engagement (65, 56%) and economic development (61, 52%), with policymaking expected least often (43, 37%). Scholars' own accounts of how they planned to communicate their results (115 responses) leaned strongly towards sharing findings with the coastal communities and local stakeholders their work concerned, consistent with this localised view of impact.

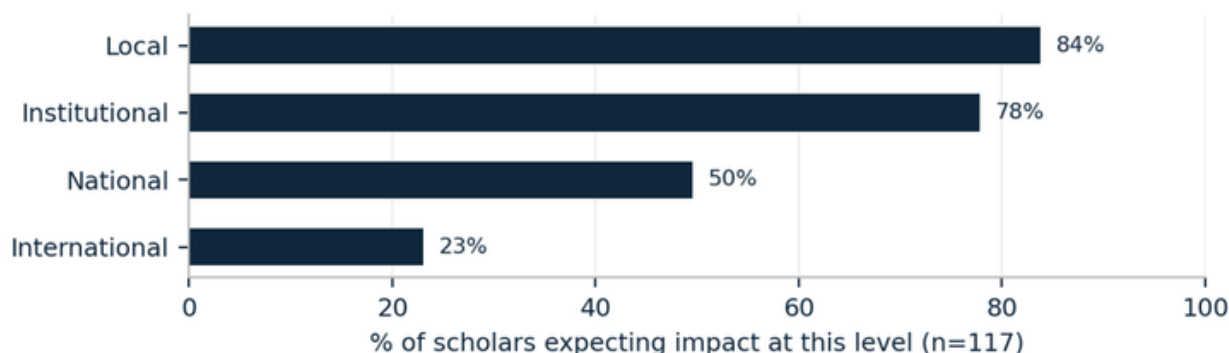


Figure 2.1 Levels at which scholars expected their research to have impact, recorded at baseline. Total: all 117 baseline respondents.

At the final evaluation, graduates consistently reported that their communication and real-world-application skills had strengthened. Recorded on a four-point scale from 'strongly disagree' to 'strongly agree', every respondent agreed their ability to present complex ideas clearly to different audiences had improved (24 of 24, 9 strongly) and that they were better at applying theoretical knowledge to real-world challenges (24 of 24, 15 strongly); a third named developing their writing style, structure and presentation of findings as one of the three areas where the scholarship made the biggest difference (9 of 24). Because these questions ask about improvement attributed to the scholarship, they evidence gains in communication capability, with dissemination and uptake of scholars' work better assessed through longer-term follow-up and in Sections 4 and 5.

2.4 Community engagement and crosscutting themes

This theme covers how scholars engaged, on equitable terms, with the communities their work affected, and how far their research addressed the programme's crosscutting themes. Both were captured at cohort level in the survey and, in more depth, through the case studies.

Scholars' research engaged the crosscutting themes to varying degrees, and the pattern differed between the two surveys: the baseline selections are reported in Section 1.5 and the final-evaluation ratings in Section 4.3. What the survey counts do not capture is the depth of that engagement in individual cases, which the case studies show more clearly.

'Gender and vulnerable groups sit at the core of the research, as women dominate the processing and trading nodes of the sun dried fish value chain, and the study examines the inequities they face, from limited access to credit and market power to unequal returns compared to other actors along the chain.'

Rachael Ackah, OCPP scholar, Ghana

Community engagement was among the more frequently reported effects of the scholarship: 6 of 24 scholars named engaging with coastal communities as one of the three areas where it made the biggest difference, and most who took the community-engagement module went on to apply it in their own research (Section 2.5). Of the 8 scholars who described their community-based work in their own words, most had already applied participatory methods in their fieldwork. This community focus was present from the outset: at baseline, 23 of the 24 scholars later re-surveyed had planned to share their results with the coastal communities, fishers and local stakeholders their work concerned. The case studies show what equitable engagement looked like in practice, with individual scholars giving previously under-represented groups a clearer voice in their research: small-scale women fish processors, local fishers and vulnerable coastal households among them. These case study examples illustrate the depth achieved by individual scholars rather than the cohort as a whole.



Case study: Syed Tashfee Ul Islam, Bangladesh

Strengthening links between marine research, livelihoods and practice

Syed Tashfee Ul-Islam, Bangladesh, MSc Aquaculture, Bangladesh Agricultural University, OCPP Scholarship 2024-25

Syed Tashfee Ul Islam came to the OCPP Scholarship from an undergraduate background in fisheries, a subject he chose for reasons he still puts simply: around three-quarters of the world is ocean and sea, and comparatively few students in Bangladesh specialise in it. The Scholarship enabled him to move out of the laboratory and into the coastal communities his work is now built around.

'If I hadn't received the scholarship, I would most likely have spent my time doing only laboratory work, as that's the usual path for many Master's students in my department. I probably wouldn't have had the same level of field exposure or practical experience.'

Research contribution

Tashfee's Master's research 'Nutritional profiling and microbial risk assessment of bivalves from the coastal regions of Bangladesh' addressed a gap created by domestic consumption patterns. Bivalves are rarely eaten in Bangladesh and are not exported, so the sector has drawn little scientific attention despite abundant coastal stocks. This is an untapped export opportunity, in his view, that no one had the evidence to pursue. His study measured both the nutritional composition of coastal bivalves and their microbial safety for consumption, and is, to his knowledge, among the first in Bangladesh to combine the two.

The work required sustained fieldwork in Cox's Bazar, Satkhira and the Sundarbans, where he stayed with harvesting communities to understand how bivalves are collected and used. His laboratory analysis of water quality and microbial load also surfaced a climate signal: *Vibrio* levels were higher in warmer coastal waters, a finding with direct implications for food safety as sea temperatures rise.

He attributes both the scale and the location of this research to the Scholarship, which gave him access to better-equipped laboratories and the means to work in the field rather than solely on campus.

Early professional outcomes

Six months after completing his master's, Tashfee joined BRAC as a Young Professional. Founded in Bangladesh in 1972 and now the world's largest Southern-led development

organisation, BRAC works across Asia and Africa. The Young Professional scheme is its flagship graduate route into mid-management, for which he was one of around 30 selected from more than 126,000 applicants. He now supports two BRAC programmes: the Ultra-Poor Graduation Programme and the Integrated Climate Change Programme, both operating in the disaster-prone coastal belt.

He is explicit that his OCPP-funded fieldwork strengthened his application, and that the community engagement skills it built are what he draws on daily. The technical subject has shifted, and he now advises on shrimp and prawn pond management rather than bivalves, but the working method transferred directly.

'I utilised that experience of community engagement with the farmers. As BRAC is an NGO, this community engagement opportunity was a great thing for me to utilise now.'

Translating field observations into farmer guidance

During three months based in Mongla, Bagerhat, Tashfee identified a consistent pattern: farmers were treating disease reactively rather than preventing it, with an estimated nine in ten not following good aquaculture practice at the pond preparation stage. Where sun-drying a pond would eliminate pathogens, farmers were skipping it to save time and applying prohibited pesticides with consequences beyond the pond for groundwater and coastal waters.

In-situ water quality measurement at coastal sampling site.



In response he wrote a three-page technical guideline for small-scale shrimp and prawn farmers in the Bagerhat region, covering pond preparation, biosecurity, feeding, disease prevention and best management practice. BRAC field staff now use this as the basis for farmer training days and weekly farm visits because it offers an effective route for reaching farmers with low literacy, who receive the content through trained staff rather than the document itself.

His next posting was in Assasuni, in Satkhira near the Sundarbans, to run an Agro Support Service Centre: mornings visiting ponds, afternoons available at the centre for farmers bringing problems to him. After completing the Young Professional year in a few months, he expects to move into a mid-management role with a national rather than district remit.

Cross-cutting themes

Tashfee rated gender and vulnerable groups, human rights, and nature-based solutions as extremely relevant to his work. The Ultra-Poor Graduation Programme he supports has an entirely female participant group in a country where women make up a very small proportion of aquaculture farmers. Within this Programme, the practical guidance he produces is delivered to women entering the sector. His advice to farmers also promotes climate-tolerant species and preventative practice in place of chemical treatment, linking productivity gains to reduced environmental harm.

Skills, networks and dissemination

Tashfee took two training modules: *'Creating knowledge together: successfully engaging communities in marine research'* and *'Writing winning PhD and postdoc proposals'*. He credits the first with building his confidence in community engagement, and is applying the second directly to a manuscript from his Master's research, which he is planning to submit for publication.

Publication is important because he and his supervisor intend to approach the Bangladesh Fisheries Research Institute and the Department of Fisheries about the bivalve findings, including their potential relevance to export policy.



'I think publishing it in a peer-reviewed journal will be a strong validation of the quality of my research and the work I've put into it.'

The Scholarship resulted in international cooperation by connecting Tashfee with Rhoda Lamptey, OCPP scholar in Ghana similarly researching microbial elements in bivalves in a different coastal context. The two exchanged laboratory and processing methods over two years. Over the next 6–12 months Tashfee intends to build field experience through his BRAC role while pursuing competitive scholarships for doctoral study abroad, with the aim of returning to coastal sustainability and aquaculture research. His stated priority is to remain in fisheries rather than moving sector, which he notes is a common trajectory among his peers.

Programme learning

- Across both his written responses and the interview, Tashfee consistently identifies his ability to work outside the laboratory as a key enabler. It shaped his research design, made him competitive for the BRAC role, and underpins the advice he now gives farmers. Where the alternative was a laboratory-based master's, scholarship designs that cover field costs appear to carry particular benefit.
- Whilst Tashfee has generated research with plausible national policy relevance and supervisory support, the ability to convert existing research into peer reviewed and policy relevant outputs is limited without post award publication support.
- Tashfee rated the Scholarship only slightly valuable for building professional networks and disagreed that his network-building ability had improved, the single negative rating from him. His own suggestions were a stronger alumni network, regular webinars, and structured cross-country collaboration.
- Where cohort building worked, it worked bilaterally and unaided. The Bangladesh–Ghana exchange on bivalve research ran for two years without programme support once the initial connection existed. Future programmes should routinely put scholars working on the same topic in different countries in touch with each other.
- Tashfee requested training on publishing, grant writing, project design and translating research into policy, areas the three modules already covered. Future programmes should offer this training again after graduation, when scholars are actually writing papers and applying for funding.

2.5 Experience of the training modules

Alongside their degrees, scholars took part in an online training programme delivered by the ACU with the International Network for Advancing Science and Policy (INASP) between August 2024 and April 2025. Three modules were offered: policy influence, community engagement in marine research, and writing PhD and postdoctoral proposals. Scholars chose two of the three according to their research interests and career plans. Each module ran over several weeks, combining live workshops with group work in thematically matched peer groups, and each required a practical output: a Policy Influence Plan, a Community-Based Participatory Research plan, or a full research proposal.

The training was evaluated through matched surveys taken before and after each module, reported in full in the OCPP Scholarships Online Training Programme final report (ACU, October 2025). Self-assessed confidence and knowledge rose across all three modules: from 3.58 to 4.46 on Module 1, from 3.64 to 4.49 on Module 2, and from 3.07 to 4.29 on Module 3, each measured on a five-point scale. Module 3 started from the lowest base and gained the most, with the sharpest single improvement anywhere in the programme being scholars' confidence in the PhD and postdoctoral application process. Scholars rated the collaborative design highly, particularly peer review, group work and the exchange between participants from different countries.

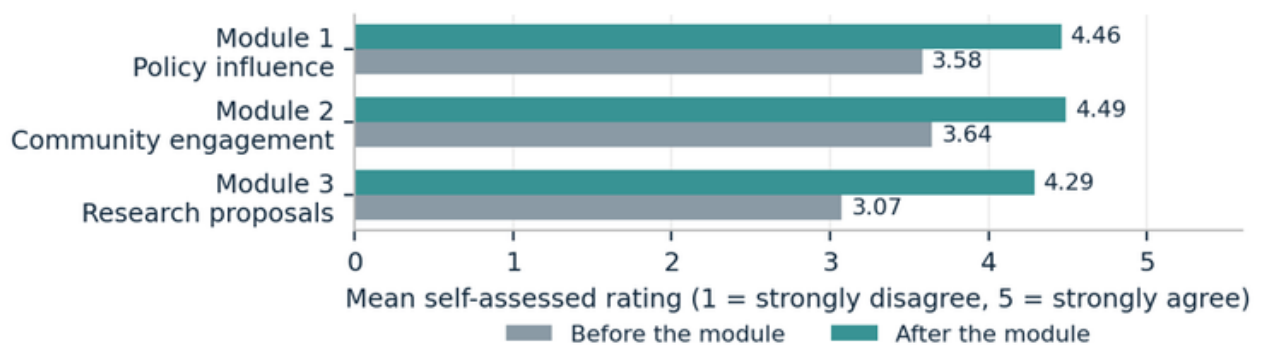


Figure 2.2 Self-assessed confidence and knowledge before and after each training module. Totals are the scholars who completed both the baseline and the relevant module survey (37, 38 and 32 respectively). Source: OCPP Scholarships Online Training Programme final report.

What the final evaluation adds is the extent to which that learning was applied in practice. Asked months later, after their degrees had finished, most graduates had gone on to use what they produced.

The programme's training modules were generally well used, though reach varied by module because scholars chose two of the three. The community-based participatory research module and the research-proposal module were completed by most scholars (bases of 20 and 19), and in both cases the large majority had gone on to use or adapt what they produced, 17 in each, and reported feeling confident in the underlying skill afterwards (19 of 20 and 18 of 19 very or somewhat confident).

The policy influence plan module reached fewer scholars (9), of whom 8 had used or adapted their plan and all 9 felt confident engaging with policy stakeholders.

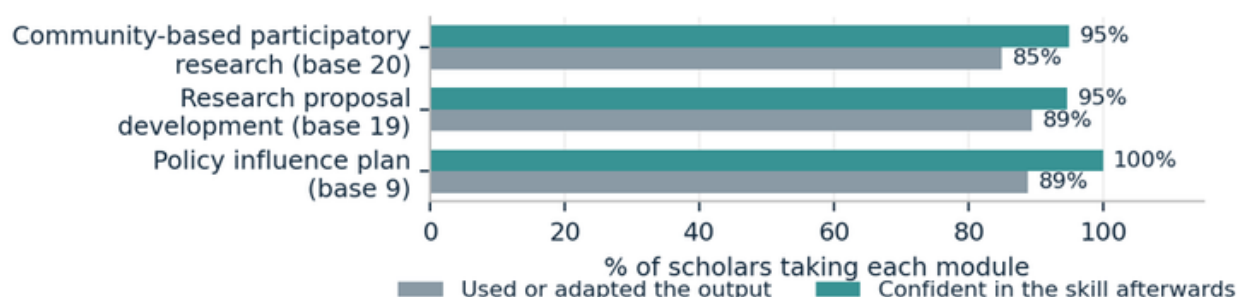


Figure 2.3 Use of module outputs and confidence in the underlying skill. Totals differ by module because scholars chose two of the three.

The open responses show what 'used or adapted' meant in practice. The proposal module produced the most tangible results: one scholar was appointed to a research fellow post after applying with the proposal they had developed on the module, and another secured research funding through a grant agreement with an international environmental organisation, and the results were strong enough for the study to be extended from a single site to national coverage. Two others built doctoral applications on their module proposal, and several used it as the frame for their dissertation.

The community engagement module helped those who took it with their research design. One scholar's dissertation was built entirely on community-based participatory mapping. Others used their plan to structure fieldwork with fishers, processors and traders across multiple sites, or to bring local knowledge into research on coastal aquaculture. Uses of the policy influence plan were more preparatory at this stage, shaping how scholars identified and communicated with fisheries officers, community leaders and local stakeholders.

The two sets of figures describe different groups and timeframes. The module surveys cover all OCPP scholars who completed each module at the point of completing it; the final evaluation covers the 24 graduates who responded after their studies ended.

2.6 Professional network development

Networking was the one skill area measured on the same terms before and after the award, so scholars' reported engagement can be compared directly. Engagement rose across every matched question, most sharply in international contacts. Professional contacts in another country showed the largest movement, from 5 of the 24 scholars engaging often or all the time before the award to 11 of 24 afterwards (21% to 46%), with personal contacts in another country rising from 8 to 12 (33% to 50%) and academic contacts at the host university from 18 to 20 (75% to 83%). Academic contacts in the host country beyond the university rose from 9 to 12 (38% to 50%), while professional contacts in the host country were essentially unchanged (14 of 23 to 14 of 24).

On international professional contacts, the responding scholars began below the full baseline cohort (21% against 41% of all 117), so part of this gain reflects a lower starting point among this group.

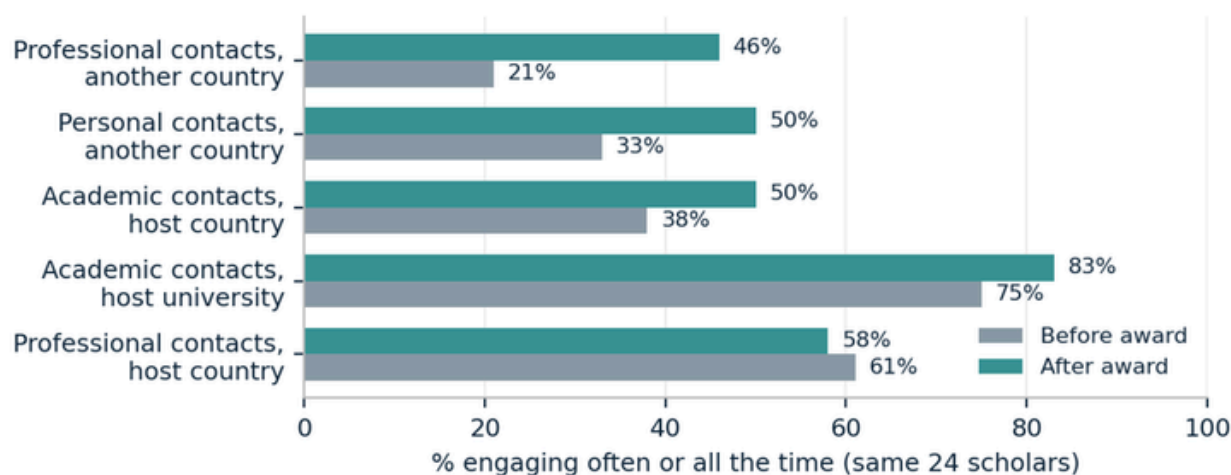


Figure 2.4 Frequency of engagement with contacts, before and after the award. Total: the same 24 scholars at both points; professional contacts in the host country n=23 at baseline.

The wider evidence from the final evaluation corroborates these findings. Almost all scholars said their ability to build professional networks with peers and experts had improved (23 of 24), two-thirds engaged often or all the time with their professional networks generally (16 of 24), and of the 22 who rated it, 21 found the scholarship very or extremely valuable in building their network. The connections formed were predominantly academic (21 of 24 named academic peers), though a majority also reported links with community organisations (13), and smaller numbers with industry professionals (8) and policymakers (7) – a spread consistent with the community-facing orientation seen elsewhere in the cohort’s work.

I was able to network with other scholars and researchers who work in the same field as mine. It helped me in expanding my research and upgrade it.'

OCCP scholar, final evaluation survey

Connections formed with peers and mentors during the training modules proved more mixed: 16 of 24 had maintained them somewhat or to a great extent, but 6 reported not at all. Given that cohort-building was an explicit aim of the training, this suggests peer connections were less durable than those formed at scholars’ host institutions and points to a clear opportunity for the programme to sustain alumni connection beyond the funded period.

Section 3: Post-scholarship employment and responsibilities

Scholars completed the final evaluation shortly after finishing their studies, so this section describes an early point in their careers. Baseline employment questions were asked at the point of application, when two-thirds of these respondents were already in study (16 of 24), so they provide context rather than a before-and-after comparison.

3.1 Employment status and sector

Most scholars were in work at the time of the final evaluation. 17 of the 24 respondents were employed (71%), almost all in full-time posts (16 of 17): 12 were in conventional employment, 4 were in paid internships or apprenticeships and 1 was self-employed. All 7 of those not in employment were actively looking. Those without work were not evenly spread: 6 of the 7 were women (7 of the 13 women responding were employed, against 10 of the 11 men), and 4 were among the 5 respondents from Bangladesh. Both patterns rest on a total of 7 and are therefore indicative.

Scholars were largely employed in academic and public institutions, with academic or education employers the largest group (8 of 17), followed by government and civil service (6), the private sector (2) and one non-governmental organisation. No respondent worked in a sector outside the options offered.

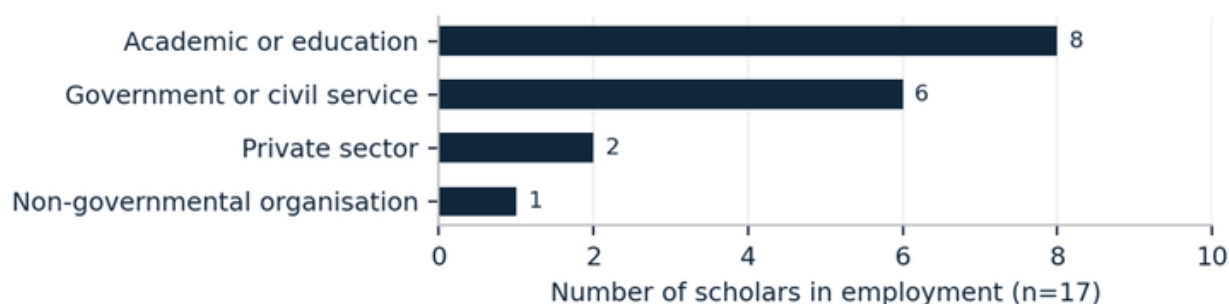


Figure 3.1 Sector of main employment. Total: the 17 respondents in employment.

Between the baseline and the final evaluation, the clearest movement was into the marine environment sector itself. Half the cohort had been working in that sector before their scholarship (12 of 24); at the end of the award, 21 of 24 said their current activities (defined in the survey as employment, volunteering or further study) related to it (88%). Of the 24, 12 were in the sector both before and after, 9 entered it during or since their award, 3 were in it at neither point, and none who had been working in it beforehand had left. Engagement was not confined to those in jobs: all 7 scholars without employment reported that their current study, training or volunteering was marine-related. Of the 3 whose activities lay outside the sector, 1 had taken up industry work for experience while continuing to look for a marine-related position, and 2 were in private sector and academic roles in other fields.

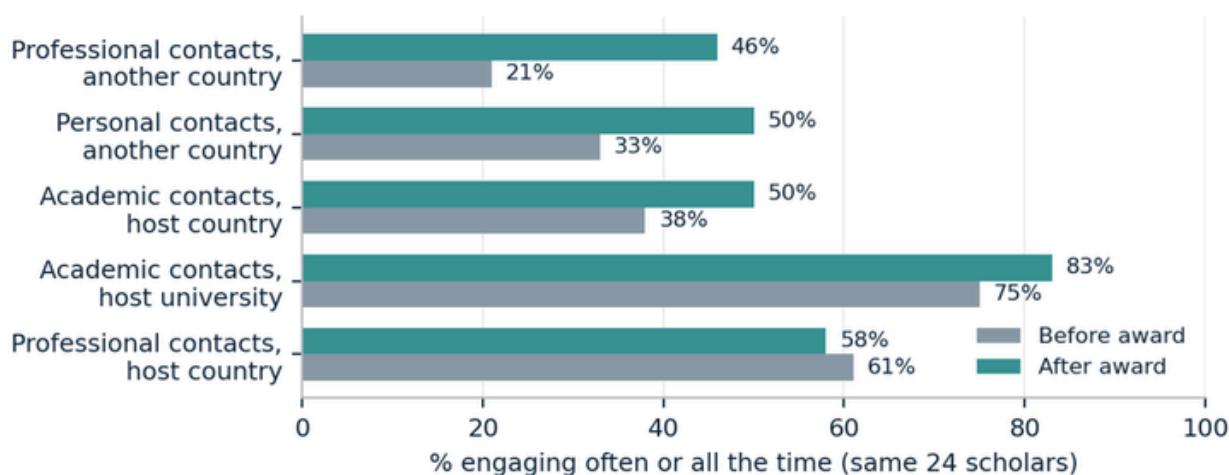


Figure 3.2 Engagement in the marine environment sector before the scholarship and at final evaluation. Total: all 24 respondents. The later figure counts employment, volunteering and further study.

For the 7 scholars who were already in work when they applied, the award did not disrupt that employment: all 7 were still employed at the final evaluation, and 6 were working in the same sector as before, the seventh having moved from national government into an academic post.

Many scholars also combined activities. Half undertook further study or training (12 of 24), a quarter were volunteering (6 of 24), and 5 of the 17 in employment held paid work alongside their main job. Their descriptions included doctoral study and PhD applications, fellowships, technical training in ocean data management and microplastics analysis, adjunct teaching, and volunteering with marine and blue economy organisations.

Since completing the Ocean Country Partnership Programme, I have continued to strengthen my technical and applied skills through several targeted trainings ... These trainings are directly supporting my role in high seas fisheries data management and strengthening my contribution to regional and international fisheries governance processes.'

OCCP scholar, final evaluation survey

3.2 Agency in employment

The final evaluation asked scholars in work how often, drawing on the learning and development gained through the scholarship, they had been able to exercise particular forms of agency in their main employment. These questions were answered by the 17 respondents in employment and describe agency the scholars themselves attributed to the programme.

At application, over half the cohort had never personally led or designed a new initiative or project (13 of 24), and only 6 had done so often or more.

Against that starting point, scholars reported exercising agency readily in their current roles. Every respondent in work had shared knowledge or skills gained during the scholarship, all doing so often or all the time (17 of 17). Almost all had introduced new ideas or practices (16 of 17), and the same proportion reported influencing decisions within their team or department and mentoring or supporting colleagues (15 of 17 each). Leading or contributing to strategic initiatives was also widely reported (14 of 17), with 7 of these respondents indicating that they did so all the time.

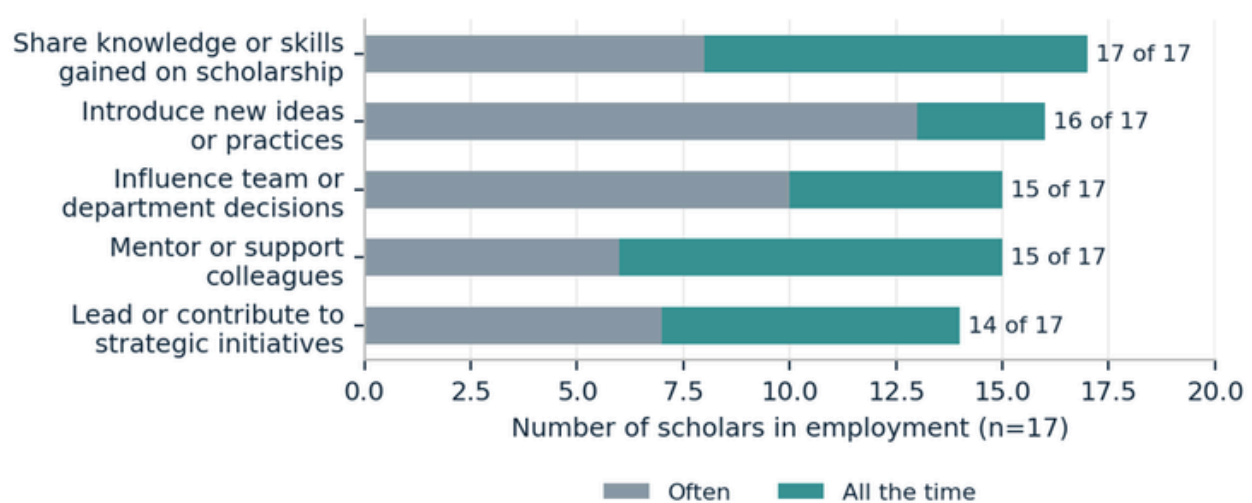


Figure 3.3 How often scholars exercised each form of agency in their main employment, drawing on their scholarship learning. Total: the 17 respondents in employment. No respondent selected 'never'.

Knowledge-sharing and mentoring was also well reported: 9 of the 17 mentored colleagues and shared scholarship knowledge all the time.

'Apart from primary research responsibilities as a PhD scholar, I am involved in a range of academic and supporting duties. These include assisting with laboratory work and mentoring junior students, supporting data collection and analysis, and contributing to literature reviews and manuscript preparation.'

OCCP scholar, final evaluation survey

3.3 Employment responsibilities

Almost all scholars were engaged in research: 21 of the 24 respondents were conducting research at the time of the final evaluation (88%), whether in employment or through continuing study; 3 were teaching, and 3 were doing neither. Research activity therefore extended well beyond those in paid work, reflecting the number of scholars who had moved into or continued doctoral study.

Among the 17 in employment, many carried responsibilities beyond their own research. 11 of the 17 held at least one leadership or management responsibility, most commonly supervising the work of other employees (8 of 17), followed by overseeing a budget (4), managing or chairing a department (3) and setting strategic direction (3). 6 reported none of these.

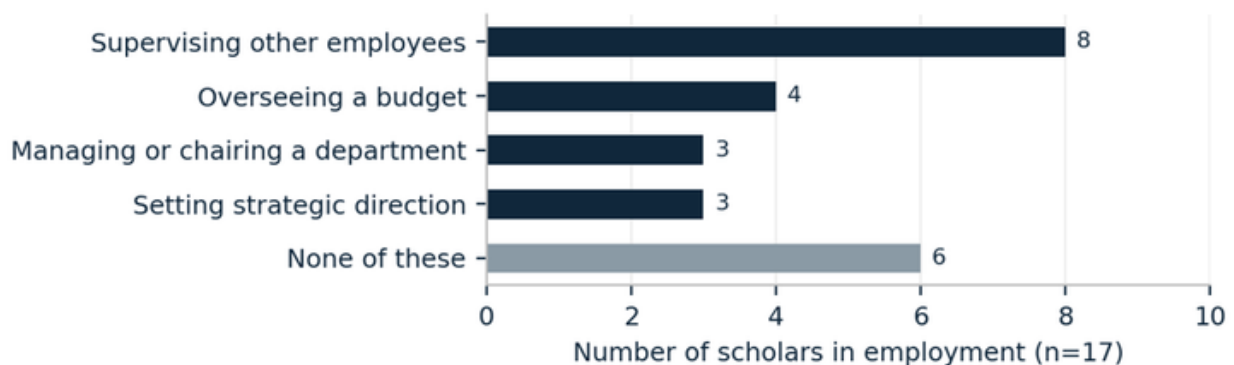


Figure 3.4 Leadership and management responsibilities held in main employment. Total: the 17 respondents in employment; scholars could report more than one.

The open responses showed what these responsibilities looked like in practice, ranging from field and organisational leadership to financial and academic duties: area commander for two reef systems, finance and budget management, drafting grant proposals, coordinating fieldwork and community engagement, curriculum development and committee work, and supervising laboratory and student research. Several combined a primary research post with a supporting academic role, including adjunct lecturing alongside a main position. Teaching itself was a minority activity: 3 of the 24 respondents taught, across secondary, undergraduate and postgraduate levels, with undergraduate teaching the most common.

'In my main employment, I also take on administrative duties (planning, budgeting, grant proposal drafting). In my secondary source of employment, I take on a student support role as an Adjunct Lecturer.'

OCCP scholar, final evaluation survey



Case study: Ed'n Newfield, Belize

Strengthening Ocean Governance Capacity in Belize

Ed'n Newfield, MPhil, Marine Environmental Science, University of Belize, Belize, OCPP Scholarship 2024-25

Ed'n Newfield joined the Belize Coast Guard and spent years on operational deployments in coastal communities enforcing fisheries regulations. It was repeat offending that turned him towards research. He now serves as an Advisor at the Belize Permanent Mission to the United Nations.

'I always realised that it was deeper than just the event itself. I wanted to understand why would you continue to degrade and destroy the same ecosystem in which you benefit from.'

Existing evidence gave him little to work with. Assessments of fisher livelihoods in Belize and the wider Caribbean were built almost entirely on stock assessments and financial metrics, which explained what fishers took but not why. His OCPP Scholarship gave him the means to answer that question properly.

What the Scholarship provided

Ed'n was awarded an OCPP Scholarship in 2024 to undertake an MPhil in Marine Environmental Science, completing in 2025, alongside online training modules delivered with INASP. He took the modules on developing a policy influence plan and on research proposal development. He is clear that the research-led structure of the award was decisive.

'I really like the way how the OCPP is framed, in terms of being an MPhil... It really gave me the opportunity to research what I wanted to know, rather than having a rigid and regimental confinement of what you're doing.'

His research applied cultural ecosystem services and ecosystem stewardship frameworks to small-scale fisheries in specific southern coastal communities, an approach for which he had to draw source material from Europe and the Pacific in the absence of a Caribbean evidence base. The policy module was taken while he was working through Belize's own fisheries governance framework, allowing the two to inform each other in real time.

Early outcomes since completion

Ed'n remains a serving member of the Belize Coast Guard but he now represents Belize in international forums. Presenting his research at GSIS 2025: Global Sustainable Island Summit conference in St Kitts in June 2025, Ed'n was approached by the event organisers about fellowship opportunities in New York. He was not then eligible as the fellowship required a Master's degree, which he completed that October, applying in the same month. He now serves as an Advisor at the Belize Permanent Mission to the United Nations under the Italy-AOSIS Fellowship, a scheme designed to bring technical capacity from Small Island Developing States into multilateral processes.

'Without the scholarship itself, I would still be on a boat in Belize. And that's just the reality of the situation.'

Ed'n provides research support to the chairs team on negotiations towards implementation of the Agreement on Biodiversity Beyond National Jurisdiction (BBNJ), working on institutional arrangements for the Secretariat, financial mechanisms and the Clearing-House Mechanism. His work includes reviewing country positions and advising on how the Clearing-House Mechanism will be operationalised. He served as climate finance lead for the fellowship at the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) session in Bonn in June 2026, and acts as technical adviser to the Mission on ocean and national security matters.

Ed'n works directly alongside Belizean government climate and finance departments in multilateral settings. He has maintained his links with the University of Belize, delivering seminars and supporting the pipeline of researchers coming through the Natural Resource Management Department, and is explicit that he wants a Belizean researcher to take his own work forward.

Research contribution

The MPhil generated primary evidence on a question Belize had no research base for. During the Scholarship, Ed'n was attached to a Smithsonian Institution and North Carolina State University research team studying per capita seafood consumption in southern coastal Belize, initially as a local focal point and subsequently contributing to field data collection and coding of the cultural analysis.

Change on a personal level

Ed'n describes a shift in how he holds a position and he also frames his contribution as a representational one. His research asked fishers non-financial questions and quantified the answers, in his words 'giving fishers a voice' and surfacing cultural dimensions of resource use that stock assessments cannot capture. He now applies that lens to policy design, citing [Belize's 30x30 marine protection commitment](#) under its Blue Bond as a case where a scientifically sound target risks disenfranchising the fishers who depend on those ecosystems and displacing pressure elsewhere.

Challenges and enabling factors

The transition from an operational, enforcement-focused environment into technical and diplomatic spaces required sustained self-directed learning, and balancing professional duties with research commitments was demanding throughout. Mentorship, exposure to international networks and early opportunities to present his work were the main enabling factors, as was, in his own account, simple availability and willingness to attempt unfamiliar work.

'I have the research and the credentials to back up certain positions, so I can speak now from a lot more confidence because I'm not just speaking anecdotally... I bring evidence, I bring years of experience, and I also bring clarity.'

Ed'n also reflects that Small Island Developing States have to produce individuals with expertise across several fields rather than large specialist teams, and that programmes like OCPP are the mechanism for doing so.

In the next 6–12 months Ed'n intends to pursue a PhD in Belize so that the findings benefit his own country. Beyond the current fellowship, he is looking either at a national position with direct influence over fisheries governance or at employment with the BBNJ Secretariat once established.

Programme learning

- The independent MPhil structure allowed Ed'n to produce original research on a question no one in Belize had studied. Bringing that evidence into policy discussions, alongside his operational experience, is what set him apart. Ed'n reports still using the policy influence and proposal development tools from the training modules when drafting negotiation propositions. This shows the value of training programme alongside the academic studies and research.
- Ed'n's recommendation was for OCPP to continue, since it promotes independent local research. With the programme now closed, that argument applies to legacy provision such as alumni connection, further research opportunities, or doctoral pathways, so that engagement does not lapse at the point where scholars are becoming most useful. He notes that postgraduate research funding in Belize is scarce, he was the only Belizean to draw on the available research funding in his year. He believes this determines whether the capacity built by the programme is sustained.

Section 4: On-award research activities

This section describes the research scholars carried out during their awards, and how the scholarship shaped it. All figures come from the final evaluation survey and rest on the 24 respondents.

4.1 The research undertaken

The scholarship supported the proliferation of new research. More than half of the respondents used the award to initiate a new dissertation or project (14 of 24), while the remainder advanced research already under way (10). The topics clustered around a small number of applied marine themes: marine pollution and microplastics; aquaculture health, including antimicrobial resistance and disease management; fisheries governance and data systems; and species and ecosystem monitoring using tools such as environmental DNA and remote sensing. The three keywords each scholar supplied reinforced this picture, with antimicrobial resistance, aquaculture and microplastics among the most frequently named. Across the cohort the work was consistently oriented towards practical marine and coastal problems rather than purely theoretical questions.

This connects directly to what scholars had set out to do. At the point of application, these same scholars had identified a primary development issue their research would address, most often marine pollution, sustainable seafood or biodiversity (Section 1.5), and the research they went on to conduct aligns closely with those intentions.

4.2 How the scholarship shaped the research

Scholars were asked to identify up to three areas where they felt the scholarship had made the biggest difference to how they approached their work. The strongest single area was research design and methodology, including data collection and analysis, selected by two-thirds of respondents (16 of 24). Access to physical and digital resources such as laboratories, equipment and data followed (12), then developing writing and presentation of findings (9) and building networks with marine-science experts (9). Refining the choice of research topic was named by a third (8). Fewer scholars pointed to engaging with coastal communities (6), dissemination opportunities (4) or research ethics (3). The evidence indicates that the scholarship's clearest contribution was to strengthening essential research skills: how the work was designed, resourced and carried out.

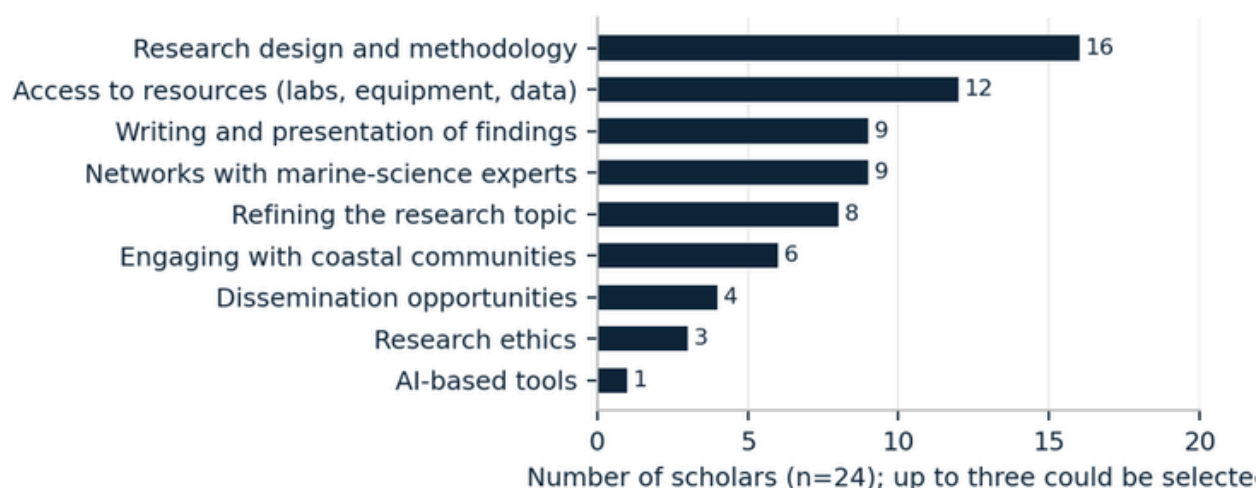


Figure 4.1 Areas in which the scholarship made the biggest difference to scholars' research. Total: all 24 respondents; up to three areas could be selected.

'The OCPP Scholarship strengthened my research design and methodology, particularly in how I approached fisheries data.'

OCPP scholar, final evaluation survey

4.3 Crosscutting themes

Scholars were asked how relevant their research was to five crosscutting themes of interest to the programme. Nature-based solutions stood out: three-quarters rated their research very or extremely relevant to it (18 of 24), the highest of any theme. Economic shocks (13 of 24) and rule of law and corruption (12) followed. Relevance to human rights and modern slavery (7) and to gender and vulnerable groups (6) was lower, though for gender a further 12 rated their work slightly relevant, so few dismissed it entirely.

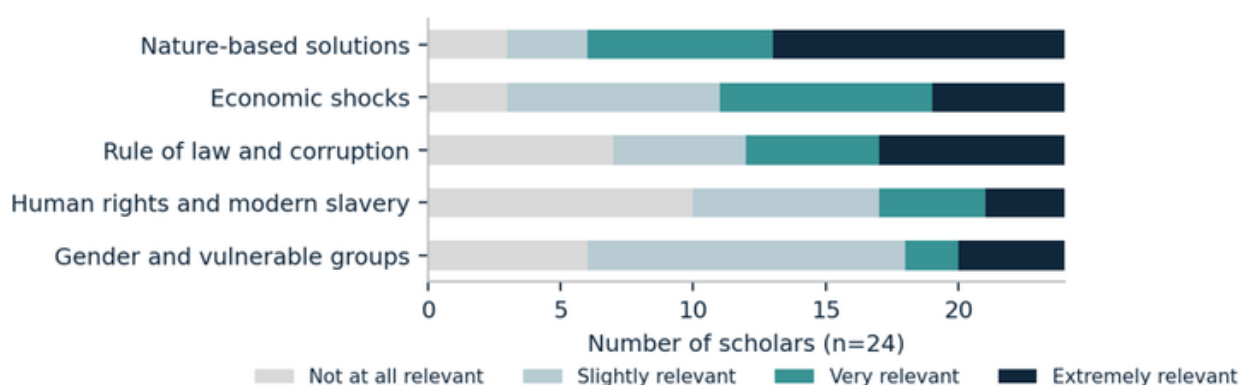


Figure 4.2 Relevance of scholars' research to the programme's crosscutting themes. Total: all 24 respondents.



The case studies show this engagement more directly than the survey figures suggest. In Rachael Ackah's research, the inequities faced by the women who dominate fish processing and trading are the central subject; other scholars built their work around vulnerable coastal households. Where scholars engaged these themes, they did so through the substance of the research, in the design of the study, the choice of participants and the questions asked.



Case study: Mere Yabaki-Goundar, Fiji

Bringing Real-Time DNA Diagnostics to Ciguatera Detection in Fiji

Mere Yabaki-Goundar, PhD Biology, The University of the South Pacific, Fiji Islands, OCPP Scholarship 2023-27

Mere Yabaki-Goundar works as technical staff in the Biology department at the University of the South Pacific (USP) in Suva, bringing a molecular biology background to the role. Her PhD, undertaken as part of the OCPP 22/23 pilot cohort, addresses ciguatera, the most common cause of fish poisoning in the Pacific, produced by a toxin-carrying microalgae, Gambierdiscus, a food-safety problem for which the region has had limited in-country diagnostic capacity.

Existing testing relies on samples being sent overseas for analysis, which is slow and limits how quickly coastal communities and fisheries authorities can act on results. Her research applies faster, field-deployable molecular methods to close that gap.

What the Scholarship provided

Mere's research applies Oxford Nanopore Technology (ONT), a portable DNA sequencing method, to identify toxin-producing algae directly from reef samples, with training and ongoing collaboration provided by Professor Peter Lockhart at Massey University in New Zealand, who supervised her Master's research.

She identifies the ability to sustain that overseas supervisory link throughout the award as one of the Scholarship's most significant practical benefits.

'The OCPP has really helped in that it's given me that kind of flexibility to work with New Zealand... I think that's not so much the case with students that have scholarships from other countries, or just the Fijian scholarships.'

Two training trips to New Zealand, one funded through her OCPP research grant, gave her hands-on time analysing her own data with specialist bioinformatics software not available in Fiji, work she describes as taking a fraction of the time it would have in Suva.

Early outcomes to date

A working diagnostic capability, now shared beyond her own project. Twelve months of reef sampling at a known ciguatera hotspot, carried out with the support of a local village's youth, produced samples confirming the presence of the target toxin-producing algae. Analysis, which was delayed for some months by international freight disruption affecting laboratory consumables, is now in its final stages, with submission targeted for December 2026 and two to three papers planned, covering seasonal patterns in the reef's microbial community linked to temperature and salinity change across the cyclone season.

A further outcome has been the technology's spread within USP. Mere's lab is, she believes, the first at the university, which connects 12 Pacific countries, to run Nanopore sequencing in-house rather than sending samples overseas. Around ten students, most without a molecular biology background, now use it for projects spanning forestry and cave microbiology as well as ciguatera. Mere and a colleague also set up informal lunchtime sessions early in her PhD, where students take turns presenting their analysis for group discussion.

'I think that's really made the difference for our lab compared to other labs at USP... people are more surprised that it's not so hard to learn the technique, and that it's just a matter of getting the right equipment that's fast enough and robust enough to churn out the data.'

Regional collaboration, put into practice

Mere helped a fellow OCPP scholar from Vanuatu verify local plant names and traditional preparation methods for his research into community knowledge of ciguatera remedies, drawing on her own regional knowledge of medicinal plant use.

A stronger evidence base for fisheries policy, in prospect

Fiji's Department of Fisheries currently has no in-country laboratory capability for this kind of testing and relies on external labs overseas. Reliable, faster detection would let the department advise coastal communities and fishing companies more confidently. This is particularly relevant given the volume of Fijian tuna exported fresh to Asian markets within days of being caught. This remains a forward-looking ambition: she has not yet formally engaged government on the policy training she took as part of OCPP, linking this candidly to the stage of her research rather than to any barrier.

A Commonwealth-wide network, sustained in practice

Mere describes the OCPP's cross-country cohort, including scholars from the Maldives and Bangladesh as well as the Pacific, as the aspect of the Scholarship she values most, maintained through informal channels since training ended.

'I keep in touch with some of them on LinkedIn, some on Facebook... We still have our chat group on WhatsApp, and we still post things on it and hear from each other. I think that's really something quite special that we've gained through this OCPP.'

Challenges and enabling factors

Freight and procurement have been a recurring source of delay. Laboratory consumables ordered from overseas have been held up by reduced shipping frequency and rising costs, and institutional purchasing and approval processes have added further time.

Two factors offset this. Her New Zealand supervisor was able to draw on other grants he held for related work, keeping the research moving while approvals and processing took their course in Fiji, an arrangement she credits with giving them flexibility across the two institutions. And the equipment supplier, shipping via a single direct flight from Singapore, provided consistently responsive service that she describes favourably.

'I think the OCPP has really helped in that it's given me that kind of flexibility to work with New Zealand because of that link with my supervisor. We are quite limited on this campus in Suva in what we're able to do, especially when it comes to working with technology and the speed in which we can analyse our data, whereas in New Zealand I was able to access a lot more, and look at my work from different angles.'



Mere collecting readings while at sampling site in Fiji.

Next 6–12 months

Mere's immediate priority is finishing data analysis, writing up two to three papers, and submitting her PhD by December 2026. She will then return to her technical staff position in USP's Biology department, where she hopes to help build out a research and potentially commercial laboratory function making fuller use of the Nanopore capability now established there.

Beyond USP, she would like to help set up equivalent sequencing capability at the university's campuses in Vanuatu and the Solomon Islands, continuing the collaborative model already under way with Vanuatu. Once her results are finalised, she also plans to share them through media and community-facing channels. She hopes this will encourage local biologists who have remained in the islands to see the knowledge they hold, particularly local knowledge, as genuinely valuable and as a route to new skills and opportunities. She points to the students now emerging from her own lab as evidence that research at that level is achievable in the Pacific, without needing to go elsewhere to do it.

This is something she sees as especially important for mature students balancing study with family responsibilities.

'The key thing that I have gained from the OCPP is the opportunity to network with other researchers within the Commonwealth countries... I find that people are much more flexible and provide a lot of options for me. When you're living in the Pacific, in a small, remote place, there's only certain people that you can ask questions with, but I think OCPP has opened that up a lot more for me and given me other contacts.'

What the Scholarship has meant

Asked what she thought she would be doing without the Scholarship, Mere pointed to the short, narrowly scoped project that preceded it. This was a one-year grant intended only to establish baseline data, which she does not believe would have gone much further on its own.

'OCPP has provided more technical support, has given us an actual lab that we can rely on to test these results, because we can't rely on the fisheries or government departments; they don't have that kind of lab. I think it's been a relief to the fisheries department that we can provide that kind of technical assistance.'



Mere working at sampling site around Fiji.

Programme learning

- Flexibility on overseas supervision is a distinguishing programme feature. OCPP's willingness to fund and sustain Mere's existing relationship with a supervisor outside the host country was, in her account, what set it apart from other scholarships available to her, and it materially shaped what her research could achieve. This is worth recognising explicitly as a design strength when considering provision of this kind in future.
- Host-institution awards can generate returns beyond the individual scholar. The Nanopore capability Mere established for her own project is now used by around ten students across unrelated research areas at USP, an institutional return well beyond her individual award and a multiplier effect worth recognising when appraising the value of host-institution-based awards of this kind.
- Research continuity needs a contingency route. Delays in freight, procurement and approval processes held up Mere's laboratory work, and were resolved only because an overseas partner institution was willing to bridge the gap with its own funding. That workaround depended on a relationship she happened to have and would not be available to every scholar. Because most OCPP Scholars study in their own countries, the capacity of the institution shapes what a scholar can achieve more directly than in an overseas-study model. Future programme design may wish to consider what contingency support, or flexibility in the timing and release of research funding, could offer scholars without such a fallback.

Section 5: Post-scholarship research activities

At the point of the final evaluation, scholars had recently completed their studies, so this section is largely a picture of activity under way and firmly planned rather than of long-established output. Even so, dissemination and continuation of the research were already visible across the cohort.

5.1 Authoring of papers, reports and grant applications

Academic publication was the most active area of dissemination. Four in five scholars were either preparing publications or already publishing (19 of 24), with 7 already in the process of publishing and a further 12 actively planning to. Several scholars described specific plans in the open responses, including papers drawn directly from their dissertations submitted to peer-reviewed journals.

5.2 Conference attendance and organisation

Presenting at academic conferences was the next most active area: two-thirds of scholars were presenting or planning to (16 of 24), 8 of them already doing so. A small number had taken on conference organisation, appearing among the research roles discussed below. Presentations outside academic conferences were less advanced, with most scholars placing them among future priorities rather than current activity (8 of 24 active).

5.4 Dissemination of on-award research

Beyond publication and conferences, scholars were asked about a wider set of dissemination and communication channels, and their progress on each. The pattern was consistent: strong activity in academic channels, with the broader knowledge-exchange and policy channels held clearly in view as intentions rather than current work. Knowledge-sharing platforms such as websites and blogs were the next most active channel (9 of 24), while collaboration with non-governmental organisations, multilateral and regional bodies and the private sector, policy development with government, policy briefs and media engagement sat overwhelmingly among future priorities. 17 scholars named collaboration with non-governmental organisations as a future priority and 16 named policy development with government, but few had begun either.

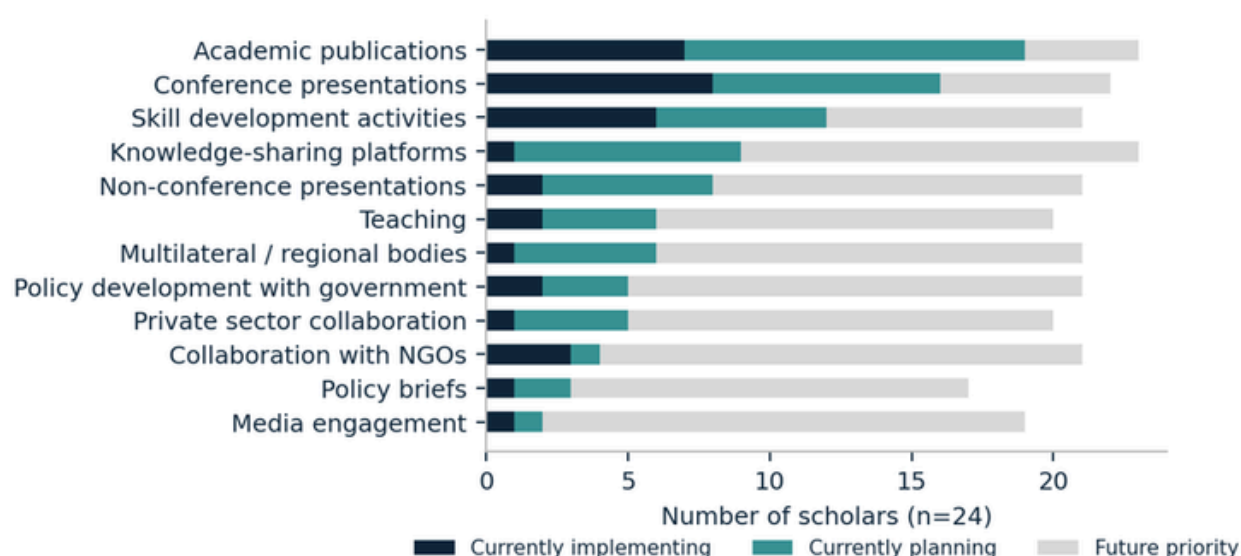


Figure 5.1 Progress on each dissemination and application channel. Total: all 24 respondents. 'No plans' and 'not applicable' responses are omitted, so bars do not total 24.

This aligns with evidence captured by the baseline survey, where scholars reported how they intended to communicate and share their findings (Section 1.6). The early concentration on academic publication and conferences, with policy and community channels still mostly at the intention stage, reflects a cohort that had only recently finished studying.

Scholars were also clear that the research would continue. 20 of the 24 intended to keep building on their dissertation or project, most often through further study (14), but also through collaborations (7) and within their current jobs (6). Plans to apply the research in their home country were more tentative: 2 had already started implementing a project and 5 had concrete plans to begin within a year, while half the cohort had ideas but no concrete plans yet (12 of 24) and 5 had no plans at the moment.



Rachael Ackah, Ghana

Recognising the Women Behind Ghana's Sun-Dried Fish Trade

Rachael Ackah, Ghana, MPhil, Integrated Coastal Zone Management, University of Cape Coast, OCPP Scholarship 2024-26

Rachael Ackah went into fieldwork for her MPhil at the University of Cape Coast expecting to find three main groups of actors in Ghana's sun-dried fish trade and planning to document the challenges they faced. A single question in her interview schedule, asking traders who they sold their fish to, changed the study. Traders sold to buyers she had not anticipated, to customers as far as Togo and Benin, and to poultry farmers when rain-affected fish needed another outlet. The value chain was larger and more connected than she had assumed, and the women running most of it were absent from policy conversations.

'Many told me that no one from government or policy circles had ever come to ask about their work before, and that my visit was the first time anyone had.'

What the Scholarship provided

Rachael was awarded an OCPP Scholarship to undertake an MPhil in Integrated Coastal Zone Management at the University of Cape Coast, alongside online training modules delivered with INASP, of which she took community engagement in marine research and research proposal development. An Erasmus+ exchange at the World Maritime University in Malmö followed; she was selected in part because her thesis sat squarely within marine governance.

The Scholarship funded a laptop and digital tools, travel, and incentives for respondents, which allowed her to study four trading hubs, Elmina, Tema, Mankessim and Agbogbloshie, staying four or five days at each site to observe before asking questions. At the time she applied for her OCPP Scholarship, the only other scholarship opportunity realistically open to her covered just tuition fees, with little left over for research. On that route she estimates she would have worked in one or two sites at most, with fewer objectives and a shallower evidence base.

'It gave me the practical means to move from a research idea on paper to a fully realised study grounded in the lived realities of the people I was studying.'

Her dissertation followed sun-dried fish from fishers through processors, wholesalers, retailers and cross-border traders. The trade is profitable at every stage, and her analysis found processors capturing the largest share of value along the chain. That margin has not converted into economic power for the women who dominate processing and trading. They described limited access to credit, physically punishing work, long market stays and reliance on old processing methods, while fishermen and boat owners are treated as the recognised voice of the industry, and weak associational structures leave individuals negotiating alone. Declining fish supply squeezes the whole chain, and poor post-harvest handling and packaging lose significant product and value, which ties the equity problem directly to food security and sustainable seafood in Ghana.

My hope is that decision makers see the women in this sector not as a vulnerable footnote, but as the actors best placed to unlock efficiency gains across the whole chain, if given the recognition and support they have long been denied.'

Early outcomes since completion

Rachael completed her MPhil and is building the research into public life from several directions at once. Her paper is in final revisions with her supervisors ahead of submission to *Aquaculture and Fisheries*, an Elsevier journal. Her place at the Innovation in Ocean Governance Symposium in Wollongong, Australia, in November 2026 is confirmed and fully funded; she will present the SWOT-based analysis of her fieldwork through a marine governance lens. She also continues the peer reviewing for *Ocean and Coastal Management* she took up around 2023, averaging at least one paper a month.

While seeking her next role, Rachael volunteers as Research and Innovation Co-Lead at Blue Economy Connect Ghana, a youth-focused NGO working across Ghana's blue economy, where she designs research concept notes and reviews those of other volunteers. When the team recently produced a policy brief on the position of women in the blue economy, her post-harvest research shaped its perspective, and she is planning a further brief of her own on women's voice in marine governance, aimed at the Fisheries Commission, the Ghana Standards Authority and the Ministry of Trade and Industry, the institutions best placed to act on the gaps her research identified around packaging quality and access to credit. A first article for her planned knowledge-sharing website, *Fish Tales and Facts in Ghana*, will focus on the position of women in Ghana's blue economy.

Applications and awards

In August 2026 Rachael was awarded the Women's Fellowship on Human Mobility in the Context of Climate Change, a West African regional programme implemented by the Women Environmental Programme with GIZ funding, for work on women fish processors and climate-driven mobility in Ghana's Central Region; by her account she was selected from some 5,000 applicants as the only awardee from Ghana. Two PhD applications in marine regulatory governance remain under review, along with the BioCAM4 Mini-Grant Fellowship

application for a Blue Ecosystem Monitor project in the Anyanui Estuary in the Volta Delta. Each application drew on the research proposal developed through the OCPP training module.

Building confidence through research

The opportunity was a presentation to more than 150 participants and facilitators from across Africa, Europe and America at COESSING, the Coastal Ocean Environment Summer School in Nigeria and Ghana, in August 2025, during her data collection period. Selected by facilitators on the strength of her practice presentation, she presented her group's work on fish processing and sensory evaluation of *Scomber scombrus* and left with accolades she had not expected. She connects the confidence directly to the depth of her research: work she could defend in detail gave her something worth being confident about. Communication training within her MPhil programme, taken alongside the OCPP modules, contributed to the same shift.

'If I had been given that same opportunity three years earlier, I honestly believe I would have frozen or fallen apart. This time, I did not.'

Fieldwork changed her practice as well as her findings. Listening moved the study from documenting challenges towards also mapping strengths and opportunities, treating the resilience of processors and traders as something to build on. Women opened up to her about exhaustion and periods of depression, about the individual processing methods and customer relationships each had developed, and about spending up to three days at a market until the last fish was sold.

Challenges and enabling factors

Rachael reports no significant barriers during the Scholarship or since; in her account the award removed the obstacles that would otherwise have shaped the work, from funding fieldwork to structured supervision. The gap she identifies is recognition. Outside the University of Cape Coast and Ghana's research institutions, employers know little of OCPP, so the award does not yet carry professional currency beyond academia.

Early-career researchers in Ghana, she argues, are judged on the skills they can put into practice, and the Scholarship gave her exactly those; what is missing is visibility for what the award represents.

'This scholarship does not just fund a degree, it builds a researcher. It gives you the tools, the exposure, and the belief in yourself factor to carry that work forward long after the scholarship ends.'

In the next 6-12 months Rachael's priority is a PhD in marine governance, the plan she regards as closest to materialising, alongside the newly awarded Women's Fellowship and the awaited BioCAM4 outcome. Her work with women processors is deliberately sequenced behind these. The first step is to take her research back to the women in their own terms and win trust before introducing improved processing practices developed by the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research and better packaging to reach a wider customer base. She began those conversations before her award ended, discussing packaging materials with processors, and plans to work through the National Fish Processors and Traders Association (NAFPTA) rather than government agencies, because processors trust the association.

Programme learning

- Research funding beyond tuition made the difference between a limited study and the one Rachael delivered. The realistic alternative would have covered fees with little for fieldwork, cutting four study sites to one or two. The depth that full fieldwork funding bought produced both the findings now heading for publication and the confidence she now draws on.
- Rachael's award carries academic prestige in Ghana but little recognition among employers outside academia. Her suggestion is visibility work, such as alumni features and joint events with government and private sector employers, so the award's academic credibility becomes professional currency in the wider job market.
- Cohort contact stopped once the training modules ended, something Rachael describes as her own mistake but one no structure existed to prevent. Her Erasmus+ network shows what sustained connection produces: four peer relationships that have supplied encouragement and technical help and pointed her towards further opportunities. With OCPP now closed, there is no equivalent home for scholar-to-scholar connection.

Section 6: Scholars' views of the scholarship

6.1 What scholars valued most

At the end of the survey scholars were asked, in their own words, what the greatest benefit of taking part in the OCPP Scholarship Programme had been. Confidence was the most frequently mentioned, named by 6 of the 15 who answered this question. Scholars described being able to defend their work, engage with a wider research community, and see themselves as researchers. One linked it directly to the training modules, which 'enhance my knowledge and strengthen my confidence'; another set it alongside research capacity as the two things the award had built:

'The greatest benefit of participating in the OCPP Scholarship Programme was the strengthening of my research capacity and professional confidence. It provided structured guidance that improved my ability to design and carry out a rigorous scientific study.'

OCPP scholar, final evaluation survey

Funding was named by 5 as the critical factor that made the research possible. One scholar described the award as providing 'essential funding to overcome the serious financial barriers to conducting quality research in our region'. Three others valued access to an opportunity that would not otherwise have existed, one noting that scholarships in the marine environment in their country are scarce. This is the realised counterpart to the expectations recorded at baseline, where financial relief was among the most commonly anticipated short-term outcomes (Section 1.7).

The third recurring theme, named by 5, was the connection between research and practice. Scholars valued being able to work on problems they already knew existed in their own countries, and to produce findings that could be acted on. One, in employment throughout the award, said:

'The flexibility to study while employed and the utility of the scholarship – you are able to do meaningful research in an area you are familiar with and fill data gaps you know exist that can translate into immediate, actionable recommendations.'

OCPP scholar, final evaluation survey

Smaller numbers pointed to international exposure and contact with experienced researchers (4) and to mentorship and structured guidance (3).

6.2 Perceptions of the scholarship

This section reports scholars' perceptions of the scholarship itself. Two other aspects of their programme experience are reported earlier: the training modules in Section 2.5 and professional networks in Section 2.6.

Scholars held the scholarships in high regard, with some qualification on their standing at home. Every respondent agreed that OCPP Scholarships are prestigious (24 of 24) and that they are relevant to the needs of their home country (24 of 24), the two strongest items. Perceptions of the scholarship's local standing were slightly more mixed: while most agreed the scholarships have a high profile (21 of 24), a high academic reputation (20) and are valued by employers (20) in their home country, a small number disagreed on each of these, suggesting the programme's reputation is well established among scholars themselves but less uniformly recognised in their home labour markets.

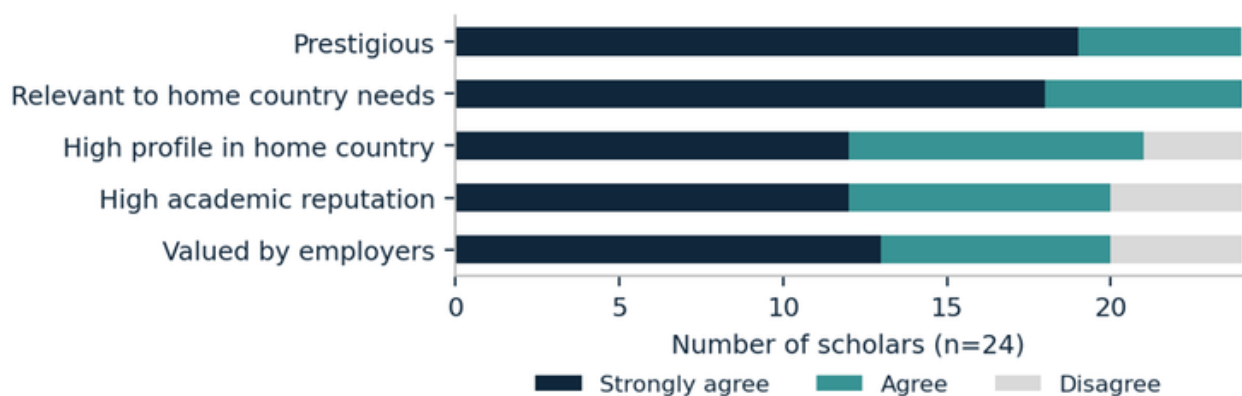


Figure 6.1 Scholars' perceptions of the OCPP Scholarships. Total: all 24 respondents.

Summary and conclusions

Did the programme achieve its objectives?

Judged against the objectives set out in the introduction, which are the evaluation's reading of the scheme's published aims rather than a formal results framework, the OCPP

Scholarships set out to build advanced knowledge and skills in marine science, enable research relevant to national and global marine priorities, and generate evidence and expertise that could inform policy and practice over time. Against the first two the evidence is clear, every scholar who responded reported improved ability to design and conduct research, analyse data and write for an academic audience, and two-thirds identified research design and methodology as the area the scholarship most changed. The research itself was applied and nationally relevant: scholars worked on marine pollution, fisheries governance, aquaculture health and species monitoring, and the topics they pursued map closely onto the development issues they had identified before their awards began.

Against the third objective the position is necessarily provisional. Scholars were surveyed within months of finishing, and the evidence shows a pipeline rather than realised influence: publications in progress, conference presentations under way, and policy engagement identified as an intention by many but begun by few. That is what should be expected at this point in an evaluation cycle, and it is the reason that the evaluation reports early outcomes rather than impact. Whether the evidence generated reaches policy and practice is a question this report cannot directly answer.

Additional outcomes of note

Three additional findings emerge strongly from the evidence. The first is retention in the marine sector. Half the cohort worked in it before their awards; afterwards nearly all did, through employment, further study or volunteering. Nine scholars entered the sector and none left it. Movement into the sector speaks directly to the scholarships' stated aim of strengthening national capacity to address marine environmental challenges.

The second is the extent to which scholars applied and passed on what they had learned. All those in work reported sharing what they had learned, and most were mentoring colleagues, several doing so continuously. One case study describes diagnostic capability established for a single doctoral project now used by around ten students in unrelated fields at the same university. Effects of this kind extend well beyond the individual award.

The third is confidence, which scholars raised repeatedly. Several described being able to hold a position on evidence or to present work to international audiences. It is particularly well evidenced across the case studies.

Challenges and constraints

Scholars identified obstacles that fall into three groups. Institutional and logistical constraints affected research directly: delays to laboratory consumables, procurement bottlenecks and limited local access to specialist equipment or software, in one case offset only by an overseas partner's willingness to bridge a gap, a workaround that would not be available to every scholar.

Recognition was the second. Scholars regarded the awards as prestigious and relevant to their countries' needs without exception, but a small number doubted that employers at home recognised them. The gap identified is visibility outside academia rather than academic standing, and it bears on how far the qualification converts into professional currency.

The third is dissemination beyond academic channels. Scholars were markedly more advanced in publishing and conference activity than in policy briefs, government engagement, media or work with non-governmental organisations, most of which sat among future priorities. Given how strongly the cohort framed its research around community and policy audiences at the outset, the gap between that intent and current activity is worth attention.

A design lesson: connection after the funding ends

One theme runs across all four case studies and is visible in the survey data. A quarter of scholars had not maintained any connection with the peers and mentors they met through the training modules, despite cohort-building being an explicit aim. Scholars described the loss of contact as unmanaged and pointed to what sustained connection produces where it exists: bilateral collaboration between scholars in different countries that ran for two years unaided, peer relationships from a separate exchange programme that supplied technical help and opened further opportunities, and continued institutional links maintained by scholars themselves.

The recommendation scholars make is consistent: some structure for alumni connection, further research opportunities or doctoral pathways, so that engagement does not lapse at precisely the point where scholars are becoming most useful. With the programme now closed, there is no home for scholar-to-scholar connection. The evidence suggests light-touch measures, such as matching scholars working on comparable topics across countries, would return a great deal relative to the effort involved.

What would be worth knowing next

A follow-up in two to three years could establish whether the publication pipeline converted into published evidence, whether the policy engagement scholars intended took place,



whether they remained in the marine sector, and whether the expected impacts they described at baseline materialised. The baseline evidence captured provides a ready comparator and the final survey provides strong indication of outcomes that could inform a fuller impact evaluation.



The Association
of Commonwealth
Universities

Woburn House
20-24 Tavistock Square
London WC1H 9HF
United Kingdom

The ACU is registered in England and
Wales as a charity, number 314137

VAT registration number: 195 9141 72