

The Association of Commonwealth Universities

Universities, scholarships and soft power

Written submission to the House of Lords Select Committee on Soft Power and the UK's Influence

Background

1. This submission focuses on the role that academic activity, and in particular government-funded scholarships, can play in soft diplomacy. While appreciating that this represents only one area of the Committee's remit, it is an important one. There is increasing evidence that academic or scientific collaboration represents one of the most effective forms of diplomacy – as demonstrated by the establishment of major programmes in the field by the American Association for the Advancement of Science and the Royal Society in the UK. International scholarships represent a very personal manifestation of this, and one in which the benefits are starting to be quantified. The comments below include evidence of this from the three main scholarship schemes of the UK government.

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2. Although based in London, and constituted as a UK charity under the patronage of Her Majesty The Queen, the Association of Commonwealth Universities (ACU) is a Commonwealth, not a UK, body. We are a membership organisation, with over 530 member institutions drawn from 45 countries. Encouragingly, at a time when the viability of some Commonwealth activities is questioned, membership is higher than at any time in our history. Our core (membership) income is approximately £1 million per annum.
3. The ACU is, in the terms of the Committee's inquiry, a 'non-state actor'. The ACU is not a government body, and it is not our primary role to generate influence for the UK or for any other country. We would draw a particular distinction here with the role of our 'sister organisation' the Agence universitaire de la Francophonie, which in 2012 had a budget of €37.1 million, of which €33.2 million came from government.¹ This difference in resources may make the Commonwealth look insignificant by comparison, but it is not a model that we would like to see adopted by the UK. We greatly value our independence from government, and emphasise that the promotion of the UK (or any other member state) is not our prime function. Nor, however, are the objectives incompatible; in many ways, 'neutral' fora such as the Commonwealth provide better opportunities for effective diplomacy than specifically UK ones. The ACU is marking its centenary year by launching an endowment fund to provide some permanent underpinning to our work. We hope that this will attract the support of the UK and other governments, on a one-off basis.

International scholarships and soft power

4. The ACU has, since 2012, been the only organisation to administer all three major international scholarship schemes of the UK government at the same time. Two of the schemes – the Chevening and Marshall Scholarships – are funded by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO), and have public diplomacy benefits as their main objective. The Commonwealth Scholarships are primarily funded by the Department for International Development (DFID), with modest support from the Department of Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) and the Scottish Government. Total investment

¹ <http://www.auf.org/auf/en-bref/budget>

from government is substantial – around £42 million per annum to support around 2,500 individuals – although significantly lower than countries such as Australia (AUD 334.2 million in 2012)², France (€86 million in 2009)³, and Germany (17,674 individuals supported in 2011)⁴.

5. In recent years, the ACU has also sought to undertake groundbreaking work on behalf of these scholarship schemes to evaluate the impact of government investment in scholarships. As a result, we believe that we are increasingly able to discuss the role that these schemes play in pursuing public diplomacy and international development objectives, and propose some practical measures to improve this. We particularly welcome increasing recognition by government over the past decade that development and public diplomacy/soft power objectives can be complementary. Development scholarships have huge potential to further public diplomacy; public diplomacy scholarships also have a real impact on recipient countries.
6. For international scholarships to generate soft power benefits, two preliminary conditions must be fulfilled. First, the recipients themselves must have influence; second, they must retain their links with their home countries, where the UK is seeking to enhance its reputation. Both of these connections can be demonstrated. The anecdotal evidence of influence is strong. A list of former Chevening, Commonwealth, and Marshall Scholars is appended. Marshall, for example, can point to several alumni who have served in the Obama administration. In recent surveys, we have sought to move beyond reliance on ‘star’ examples to establish more general evidence. A survey of Commonwealth Scholarships alumni, for example, found that 45% of respondents had influenced government thinking in specific policy areas, and 25% had held public office.⁵ 18% of Marshall alumni who responded to a recent (2012) survey had also held ‘a political or public related post’, and 37% had served as a board member or trustee of a charitable or public body. In sectors where comparisons are possible, award holders rise to disproportionately senior levels in their career – a claim backed up by income levels – and their scholarship is instrumental in gaining career advancement. All of this might be expected as holders of prestigious UK degrees.
7. Surveys of Commonwealth Scholars consistently show between 85% and 92% of former award holders living in their home regions, and around one-sixth of Marshall Scholars have studied or worked outside the United States. In both cases, there is strong evidence that these scholars return and build careers in their home countries, although the importance of this is being diluted by the increasing trend of ‘global careers’ during which alumni work in several countries. We would also emphasise that alumni not working in their home countries can still have significant benefits for the UK; many work, for example, for intergovernmental bodies or NGOs. A recent example is the current Governor of the Bank of England, who undertook his doctorate at the University of Oxford on a Commonwealth Scholarship.
8. Moving beyond this, soft power relations require a willingness on the part of the individual to retain relations with the UK. Our ability to quantify this is in its infancy, but the available evidence is highly encouraging. Commonwealth Scholarship surveys have

² <http://www.australiaawards.gov.au/content/about.html>

³ French Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs, *Receiving foreign students* (2010), p.5
http://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/en/IMG/pdf/MAE_mobilite_etudiante_v_anglaise_web.pdf

⁴ DAAD, 2011 Annual Report (2012), p.94

https://www.daad.de/imperia/md/content/presse/daad_jahresbericht-11-engl_120712b.pdf

⁵ Commonwealth Scholarship Commission in the United Kingdom, *Evaluating Commonwealth Scholarships in the United Kingdom: Assessing impact in key priority areas* (2009)
<http://cscuk.dfid.gov.uk/2009/06/assessing-impact-in-key-priority-areas>

broken down these links into several categories. 88% of Marshall survey respondents had visited (or lived in) the UK since their awards, and 30% had visited at least every four years. Around a quarter said that these visits were mainly for business purposes, and 59% rated business as at least equal with social reasons for their visits. Marshall has also started to examine financial contributions to the UK. 45% of survey respondents had made a donation to, or financial investment in, a UK institution since their award. The Association of Marshall Scholars (the US-based Marshall alumni association) is also playing an important fundraising role, while almost 200 former Commonwealth Scholars contributed to an endowment fund set up to mark the 50th anniversary of the scheme in 2009.

9. The detailed evaluation of scholarships remains in its infancy, and many of the findings above can be seen as a *proxy* for public diplomacy and soft power benefit, rather than firm evidence. However, the evidence does suggest that scholarship alumni have significant potential to influence the reputation of the UK, and clear willingness to maintain their connections with this country. The policy question remains, therefore, what can be done to *increase* the prospect of this happening in practice? In this context, we would make the following observations:
 - a. *Funding needs to be at competitive levels.* Although HMG invests some resources in international scholarships, we note above that this investment has not kept pace with countries that we might regard as ‘competitors’ both in public diplomacy terms or as providers of higher education. For example, China plans to increase the number of government scholarships offered to international students to 50,000 by 2015.⁶ Although the process has not been even (DFID, for example, has recognised the value of the contributions that such scholarships make to development, and has consequently increased funding for Commonwealth Scholarships in real terms since 2008), support for all three schemes is significantly lower in real terms than at their historical peak.
 - b. *Branding is vital.* International scholarships depend largely on their historical reputation and prestige. This can take decades to build. In the UK context, alumni associate themselves directly with the Chevening, Commonwealth, and Marshall communities, as well as with the UK generally. In this context, the UK has three very strong international brands, which have been built up over 60 years. It is critical that all three are preserved, and resourced to a level that remains internationally competitive.
 - c. *HMG scholarships need to be seen as a coherent package.* Although we regard maintenance of the three ‘brands’ as critical, awareness of each, and coordination between the branches of HMG offering them, has historically been weak. This has, however, improved in recent years and we now sense a real desire on the part of FCO, DFID and BIS in particular to work together. Some practical ways through which this can be achieved – such as strengthening the UK experience for scholars and subsequent alumni programmes – are highlighted below.
 - d. *Serendipity is inevitable, but can be managed.* Scholarships, like higher education generally, involve a degree of unpredictability. They are essentially an investment in high-quality individuals, with all the uncertainty that this involves. That said, ways can be developed to focus investment on specific sectors. Distance learning scholarships

⁶ Yang Xinyu, ‘National Policy and Government Support for Student Mobility’, presentation at the Conference about Cooperation between European and Chinese Higher Education Institutions, 16-17 May 2011, Peking University, China (http://www.emeuropoasia.org/upload/EMECW11/Conf_YANG_XINYU_CSC.pdf)

offered by the Commonwealth Scholarships scheme, for example, focus on targeted courses and sectors. Doctoral Commonwealth Scholars are known to go on to careers in academia in particularly high numbers. Candidates for Chevening Scholarships must have a minimum level of work experience. All three schemes have developed 'leadership' criteria for use in their selection processes. The Commonwealth scheme also maintains virtual 'professional networks' for alumni in related areas of work.

- e. *UK experience is vital.* For many years, surprisingly little attention was paid to the experience of HMG scholarship holders while in the UK. In recent years, there has been welcome recognition that the schemes can do much to improve this, and at the same time emphasising the connection of HMG with the scholarships. This experience needs to embrace many elements of British life, but an insight into the UK system of government should be prominent. There is much good practice here already – Marshall Scholars visit Downing Street, both FCO and DFID make ministers available to attend welcome programmes and other events, and some scholars will meet Her Majesty The Queen next month, while the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association annually hosts an event for Commonwealth Scholars in the Palace of Westminster. This is an area in which all three schemes are developing their work.
- f. *British Embassies and High Commissions have a critical role to play.* Just as the experience of scholarship holders in the UK needs to be actively managed, so does contact with HMG on their return home. In our view, this responsibility rests squarely with British Embassies. Once again, there is much good practice here, particularly within the Chevening and Marshall schemes; this has been less the case with Commonwealth Scholarships, perhaps because of the DFID funding base and lack of awareness. With the new desire for HMG to work together, however, we feel this is changing. Fundamental to this approach is the ability of the three schemes to provide posts with necessary information and contacts. A good example of this is the Directory of Commonwealth Scholars, which is updated online annually. Marshall Scholars also have a very tight network, highlighted by the staggering fact that over 50% of all those ever to hold a Marshall Scholarship answered a recent survey. In the case of Chevening, too, the many local databases are now being combined into a global one. It is likely that, within the next two years, we might even be able to produce a global directory comprising all three schemes. Such data is not only of use to Embassies and others in identifying individual contacts, but it also underpins our efforts to rigorously measure impact through surveys of alumni.

Soft diplomacy and the wider higher education context

- 10. This submission has primarily discussed the role of international scholarships and soft power. We now conclude with some comments on the importance of higher education more generally. As stated above, there is growing recognition that academic relations are a particularly powerful tool of diplomacy; academics tend to speak the same language as their disciplinary peers in a way that is likely to survive short-term political circumstances. From the student perspective, we have also presented evidence above that higher education can affect individuals at a particularly important time of their life.
- 11. Immigration policy is significant in realising this potential. Immigration issues have generally been resolved for the HMG-funded scholarship holders that we refer to above – they receive additional help from the team at the ACU, they have greater credibility than most students, and, where necessary, we are able to draw on the support of Embassies and High Commissions. Anecdotal information from ACU members, however, confirms increasing concern about the UK as an accessible destination. Our

experience of organising the annual Commonwealth Residential School for the first time in the UK this year reinforced our fears, with applicants from three countries (who had been chosen from some 200 applying for bursaries) being rejected. These decisions were hard to fault on the grounds of criteria supplied to UKBA officials; our bursaries were specifically intended to attract students without the means to otherwise travel to the UK, and who were thus seen as high risk. The inability of the UK to welcome such talent, even for a short period, is nonetheless of concern.

12. The final point we would like to make concerns outward mobility. Much has been said about the desirability of more UK students undertaking some part of their course overseas, and we would endorse this. Much of the focus of this debate (for funding and political reasons) has focused on Europe, but we believe that the Commonwealth – as a two-way organisation with immense diversity and extensive use of English – should not be overlooked as a channel for such activity. Nor should such activity be confined to the ‘developed’ Commonwealth. Although the vast majority of Commonwealth Scholarships are held (and funded by) the UK, the scheme has widespread capability to arrange awards (not funded by the UK) in other member states. Each year, UK candidates are nominated for awards in locations such as Brunei Darussalam, India, Malaysia, New Zealand, and Trinidad and Tobago. The number of countries is increasing – largely thanks to the anniversary endowment fund mentioned earlier – so that Commonwealth Scholarships now exist in Kenya, Samoa, South Africa, Sri Lanka, Swaziland, and other low and middle income countries. Sadly, however, the withdrawal of Canada this year has been a step in the opposite direction. We believe that developing a Commonwealth-wide programme in conjunction with other governments, but based on the foundations laid by the existing Commonwealth Scholarship and Fellowship Plan (CSFP), could be an important element of UK policy in the area of outward mobility, which would in turn contribute to public diplomacy objectives.

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The opinions stated above reflect the views of the Association of Commonwealth Universities alone, and not necessarily those of the HMG scholarship schemes or their funding departments which are quoted.

Appendix 1: Eminent alumni

Chevening Scholars

Sergei Stanishev	Bulgaria	currently President of the Party of European Socialists; former Prime Minister of Bulgaria
Alvaro Uribe Velez	Colombia	former President of Colombia
Baldwin Spencer	Antigua and Barbuda	Prime Minister of Antigua and Barbuda
Anote Tong	Kiribati	President of Kiribati
Marek Belka	Poland	currently Head of the National Bank of Poland; former Prime Minister of Poland
Joao Miranda	Angola	former Minister for Foreign Affairs, Angola
Gega Mgaloblishvili	Georgia	former Prime Minister of Georgia
Wang Lili	China	Vice Governor of the Industrial and Commercial Bank of China
Bozidarka Dodik	Bosnia and Herzegovina	Supreme Court Judge, Bosnia and Herzegovina

Commonwealth Scholars

Dame Bridget Ogilvie	Australia	former Director of the Wellcome Trust, UK
Professor Germaine Greer	Australia	Broadcaster and author
Nicholas J O Liverpool	Dominica	former President of Dominica
Dr Michael Cullen	New Zealand	former Deputy Prime Minister; Minister of Finance; Minister of Tertiary Education; Shadow Leader of the House, New Zealand
Dr Kevin Lynch	Canada	former Deputy Minister, Department of Finance, Canada; Executive Director at the International Monetary Fund; Clerk of the Privy Council and Secretary to the Cabinet, Canada
Professor Elizabeth Blackburn	Australia	2009 recipient of Nobel Prize for Medicine or Physiology
Sir Ross Cranston	Australia	currently High Court Judge, UK; former Member of Parliament; Solicitor General, UK
Professor Atiur Rahman	Bangladesh	Governor, Bangladesh Bank
Professor Walter Woon	Singapore	former Attorney General, Singapore
Dr Kenny Anthony	St Lucia	Prime Minister of St Lucia
Dr Rolph Payet	Seychelles	Minister for Environment and Energy, Seychelles; Founding President and Vice Chancellor, University of the Seychelles
Mark Carney	Canada	Governor, Bank of England
Alison Stone Roofe	Jamaica	Jamaica's first Ambassador to Brazil

Marshall Scholars*

Dr Ray Dolby	Founder and Chairman, Dolby Laboratories
Justice Stephen Breyer	Supreme Court Justice
Bruce Babbitt	former Governor of Arizona; US Secretary of the Interior for President Bill Clinton; 1988 Presidential candidate
Professor Roger Tsien	2008 Nobel Prize for Chemistry
Thomas Friedman	Pulitzer Prize-winning author; columnist for <i>The New York Times</i>
Dr Cindy Sughrue	Chief Executive, Scottish Ballet
Reid Hoffman	Founder and CEO, LinkedIn
Professor Amy Finkelstein	Winner of the Clark Medal for Economics

* Marshall Scholarships are awarded to US citizens