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Reprieve for doctoral Commonwealth Scholarships

Following the decision by the British Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) to withdraw funding for the Commonwealth Scholarship and Fellowship Plan (CSFP) in March this year, news that the UK Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills (DIUS) will partner with UK universities to provide scholarships to the developed Commonwealth has been welcomed. Countries affected by the original FCO decision included Australia, the Bahamas, Brunei Darussalam, Canada, Cyprus, Malta, New Zealand and Singapore. Scholarships for students from developing countries were unaffected as they are funded separately by the UK Department for International Development (DfID) which has committed to increase its contribution to the CSFP from £15.9 million to £17.4 million for 2009/10. The new partnership scholarships will sponsor PhD applicants from the countries listed above to study at UK universities.

As reported in VC Net 80, the FCO announced it was withdrawing funding because of a strategic refocus of priorities on developing links with China and India and concentrating resources on climate change and cultivating future leaders. However, one suspects that the decision might not have been entirely unconnected to the comparatively poor settlement for the FCO in the UK budget allocations for 2008 to 2010. Much of the criticism levelled at the decision focused on the important contribution that international scholarships make to the UK higher education sector. This view appears to have fallen on sympathetic ears within the British government. In announcing this new scheme, the newly appointed Minister of State for Higher Education and Intellectual Property, David Lammy, emphasised that these "scholarships are important for helping our universities remain competitive in attracting the best international research talent, ensuring continued excellence of UK higher education".

DIUS will pump £450,000 into the scheme in 2009/10 and at least £400,000 in 2010/11, beyond this no decision has yet been made as it will be dependent on the budget allocations for 2011 to 2013. Government funds will support the first half of the doctoral programme, while host institutions will fund the second half. The fact that the new scheme is a partnership between the government and UK universities testifies to the high regard with which British universities hold the CSFP and the scholars it attracts. So far 20 universities, including Oxford and Cambridge, have agreed to participate in the scheme.

The applications for study will be assessed according to:

- The academic merit of the candidate
- The quality of the proposal

- The potential of the candidate to lead in the pursuit of global excellence in research and knowledge

This development follows a high profile campaign, including a petition to the UK Prime Minister to reinstate the funding, signed by nearly 2000 current or former scholars and other interested parties such as the former prime ministers of Australia and Canada. Labelling the recent decision a u-turn however, would be slightly over-stating the case. Not only do the funds come from a different department, the amount of funding and number awards are much reduced. The FCO commitment of around £2 million per annum funded between 45-55 new awards per year (for both master's and doctoral study). Indeed for 2008/09, the last year of newly funded FCO awards, 53 new scholarships were awarded including 15 for doctoral programmes (which the FCO will continue to fund until 2010/11). No new awards at master's level will be made under the new scheme, but DIUS will co-fund 16-18 new PhD awards from 2009. It is not a replacement of the old scheme, but it does represent a definite step forward from the position in March and will undoubtedly be warmly welcomed in those countries that will receive scholarships as well as by UK institutions. The chief executive of Universities UK, Diana Warwick, stated: "This is good news. Scholarships are crucial if the UK is to continue to attract the very best students to the UK."

Sources:

- Commonwealth Scholarship Commission press statement (16 October 2008): *Universities welcome scholarships restoration*. Available from: http://www.cscuk.ac.uk/docs/Press_release_10-16DIUSfunding.pdf.
- Universities UK press statement (16 October 2008): *Universities UK welcomes partial restoration of Commonwealth Scholarships*. Available from: <http://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/Newsroom/Media-Releases/Pages/scholarships.aspx>

African tertiary education heralded by international donors

The World Bank has released a new study on sub-Saharan Africa arguing for 'knowledge intensive growth' as a way of refocusing tertiary education to support national development. This is the latest in a series of World Bank publications highlighting the role of tertiary education in supporting development in Africa and coincides with a number of recent donor initiatives and announcements. The report, which was presented to African Finance Ministers earlier this month, is based on an analysis of increasing enrolment rates, funding, and an expanding private education sector. The report argues for a redefinition of tertiary education, characterised by 'networked, differentiated, and responsive institutions ... a 21st century version of the African 'development university''. It is a model of the university which the Partnership for Higher Education in Africa (PHEA), a consortium of prominent US foundations, has been supporting since its development in 2000. The Partnership has focused on strengthening several core institutions in nine Africa countries and enabling them to better contribute to poverty reduction, economic growth, and social development. Specific investments in the past have related to purchasing consortia, ICT capacity, and organisational restructuring. Earlier this month the Partnership announced a commitment to extend funding beyond its original 10 year plan and noted that by 2010 US\$350 million will have been allocated in Partnership grants.

The World Bank report makes a series of recommendations and emphasises the importance of regional and sub-regional networks in building capacity and drawing on international experience, best practice, and innovation. Correspondingly the Association of African Universities announced last month a list of approved projects under its Mobilisation of Regional Capacity Initiative (MRCI), funded by £3.5 million from the UK's Department for International Development (DfID). The aim of MRCI is to strengthen partnerships between the AAU and other higher education sub-regional and national bodies, again with a commitment to poverty eradication and sustainable development. Inter-university organisations (e.g. IUCEA), subject-specialist groups (e.g. ANAFE), and leading universities, have been selected to research and develop collaborative networks with a view to sharing information and encouraging innovation.

International institutional partnerships are another focus of recent donor funding with the US, Germany, and the UK all launching programmes in recent months to support collaborative programmes with higher education institutions in Africa. The Africa-US Higher Education Initiative released details last month of up to 20 partnership grants of US\$50,000 for long-term collaboration between African and US higher education. Meanwhile, DAAD, the German Academic Exchange Service, launched an initiative earlier this year to support the development of Centres of Excellence aimed at providing training and research opportunities for future leaders, policy-makers and executives in Africa. The first in a series of five planned centres opened in September at the University of Dar es Salaam. The German-Tanzanian Centre for Postgraduate Studies in Law involves the collaboration of the University of Bayreuth and the University of Dar es Salaam to provide postgraduate programmes in law. The other centres are planned for Congo, Ghana, Namibia, and South Africa. The centres will constitute a network providing opportunities for trans-continental research and collaboration as well as fostering close ties with Germany. A third initiative was the September launch of the UK Department for Innovation Universities and Skills (DIUS) 'Education Partnerships in Africa' (EPA) programme. Emerging from the earlier 'England-Africa Partnerships in Higher Education', the EPA will receive £4.5 million to fund education partnerships between England and sub-Saharan Africa between 2008 and 2011. Managed by the British Council the project incorporates both higher and further education and will focus on priority areas such as employability, social enterprise and entrepreneurship. All these developments highlight the importance of regional and international partnerships on the international donor agenda for tertiary education, particularly as a strategy for building capacity in the African continent. It will be interesting to see if this proves to be an enduring or transient trend, especially as aid commitments come under increasing pressure from global economic instability.

Sources:

- World Bank (October 2008). *Accelerating Catch-Up: Tertiary Education for Growth in Sub-Saharan Africa*. Available from: <http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/COUNTRIES/AFRICAEXT/0,,contentMDK:21937331~menuPK:258658~pagePK:2865106~piPK:2865128~theSitePK:258644,00.html>
- Partnership for Higher Education in Africa press statement (6 October 2008): U. S. Foundations Affirm Commitment To African Higher Education Beyond 10-Year Mark Of Current Partnership. Available from: www.carnegie.org/sub/news/beyond_10.html
- Association of African Universities: *Final list of projects approved for the 2008 MRCI – Challenge Funds Support*. Available from: www.aau.org/mrci/docs/final_list_approv_for_funds.pdf
- Higher Education for Development: *Higher Education for Development to Manage Planning Grant Competition for the Africa-U.S. Higher Education Initiative*. Available from: www.hedprogram.org/tabid/225/itemid/172/Higher-Education-for-Development-to-Manage-Plannin.aspx
- DAAD. *Call for Applications: "Establishment of Centres of Excellence for Teaching and Research to Train Future Leaders in Sub-Saharan Africa"*. Available from: www.daad.de/hochschulen/ausschreibungen/07932.de.html
- British Council. Information on Education Partnerships in Africa (EPA) available from: www.britishcouncil.org/learning-epa.htm

Getting to grips with global ranking systems

As the number of published academic rankings proliferate, their value, as distinct from their influence, seems less certain. In part the rise of such ratings reflects a competitive internationalised higher education market, apparent 'accountability', and the power of the internet to disseminate the findings internationally. Responding to the growth and controversy around global ranking systems the US-based Institute for Higher Education Policy (IHEP) has this month launched a 'Ranking Systems Clearinghouse' as part of its wider programme - the New Agenda for College and University Rankings. IHEP, which has worked with UNESCO-CEPES and the International Rankings Expert Group (IREG) in the past, intends its new online resource to be 'a roadmap of the complex ranking landscape for more than 30 countries, offering annotated links to national and international ranking systems'. It is a

detailed and clearly organised database of recent and current sources, representing the growth of research and opinion on rankings, league tables, and related metrics.

Resources included in the Clearinghouse are divided into the following categories:

- International ranking systems and related resources
- National ranking systems and related resources (covering 34 countries)
- Ranking systems resources by topic
- International efforts to improve ranking systems
- IHEP's efforts to improve ranking systems

The sheer volume of resources available through the Clearinghouse is testimony to the growing force and diversity of international rankings. Debate around the utility and reliability of ranking systems is widespread and was the subject of a report commissioned by the Higher Education Funding Council for England earlier this year [see VC Net 77]. However it is precisely the simplicity of ranking systems, for which they are often criticised, that makes for good headlines and considerably influence, forcing universities to respond. It is a trend unlikely to abate, as reflected in the recent flurry of coverage of the World University Rankings (Times Higher Education-QS) published earlier this month and the Academic Ranking of World Universities - ARWU (Shanghai Jiao Tong University), published in August. The Clearinghouse affords a means of navigating what is becoming an increasingly crowded terrain, and provides users with an evidence base for better informed analysis and comparison of rankings.

Sources:

- Institute for Higher Education Policy *Ranking Systems Clearinghouse*. Available from: <http://www.ihep.org/Research/rankingsystemsclearinghouse.cfm>
Press release (8 October 2008):
www.ihep.org/press-room/news_release-detail.cfm?id=156
- Times Higher Education-QS *World University Rankings*. Available from: www.timeshighereducation.co.uk
- Shanghai Jiao Tong University *Academic Ranking of World Universities*. Available from: www.arwu.org
- HEFCE. *Counting What Is Measured or Measuring What Counts: League Tables and Their Impact on Higher Education Institutions in England* (HEFCE Paper (April 2008/14)) (2008). Available from: www.hefce.ac.uk/pubs/hefce/2008/08_14

Commonwealth Universities Yearbook ((82nd 2008 edition)

The latest 'Commonwealth Universities Yearbook', published this month, is also to be the last published in hard copy. It has proved an invaluable source of authoritative and comparative data since its first edition in 1914. In the future information will be made available via an online database and CD-ROM.

Key publications

A selection of recent publications on higher education:

- **Higher Education in Africa: the International Dimension** [Teferra, D.; Knight, J. (eds.); 978-99-8858-940-9; Center for International Higher Education (CIHE) - Boston College, & Association of African Universities (AAU); 2008]
(www.bc.edu/bc_org/avp/soe/cihe/inhea/HEAfrIntbook.htm)
Thematic essays on internationalisation and international student mobility in Africa. One outcome of the book's research is the establishment of the African Network for the Internationalisation of Education (ANIE), which plans to promote further research into this subject.
- **Trends Shaping Education (2008)** [Istance, D.; Theisens, H. (eds.); 978-92-64-04661-0; OECD; 2008]
(<http://213.253.134.43/oecl/pdfs/browseit/9608081E.PDF>)

(www.oecd.org/document/58/0,3343,en_2649_35845581_41208186_1_1_1_37455,00.htm)

Analysis of trends which could affect long-term strategic thinking in education, ranging from the environment, economics, ICT, labour, and social structures.

- **Joint and Double Degree Programmes: Vexing Questions and Issues** [Knight, J.; OBHE; 2008 (www.obhe.ac.uk)]
Examines the types and sometimes confusing distinctions between, collaborative qualifications, assessing their potential as HE internationalisation continues to expand. Implications for institutional autonomy, funding, and quality are considered.
- **Review of National Policies for Education: South Africa** [Background report: Wits Education Policy Unit (EPU), with assistance of Department of Education, South Africa; Examiners' Report: International Review Team; 978-92-64-05348-9; OECD; 2008] (<http://213.253.134.43/oecd/pdfs/browseit/9108171E.PDF>) (www.oecd.org/document/58/0,3343,en_33873108_39418625_41422650_1_1_1_1,00.htm)
Detailed study of South Africa's education policy and system including funding and curriculum, with a concluding section on higher education. Includes effects of recent restructuring of higher education. Strategic recommendations suggested.

The authors, Jay Kubler, and Nick Mulhern, are always pleased to receive comments on the usefulness and content of this briefing. News from other Commonwealth countries, which might be of wider interest, is also most welcome. They can be contacted by e-mail on vcnet@acu.ac.uk or by fax on +44 (0)20 7387 2655.
