

Group discussion session report:

Scholarships and the development agenda

Should development scholarships focus on specific subject areas, rather than being available for any subject?

After the group discussed a perceived imbalance between natural sciences and social sciences, most agreed that it was important to get a wide spread of subject areas, and thus awards should not be focused or restricted. Many contributions emphasised the importance of assessing developmental needs on a country-by-country basis, and this could perhaps best be facilitated by closer liaison with nominating agencies.

Two tangential, but interesting, points also emerged. First, that there should be a stronger emphasis on managerial skills alongside all subject areas. This, of course, is applicable more at the university end than the CSC end, but highlighted how important these skills can be in future leadership roles – in securing funding, project management, and passing on transferable skills in the long term. Secondly, it was mentioned that awards could be ‘outsourced’ to India comparatively cheaper than the UK. This is, of course, a highly complex political minefield and would exceed the current remit of the CSC, but is nevertheless an interesting proposition that challenges the assumption (rightly or wrongly held) that the UK is best placed to host awards.

What level of scholarship will best meet developmental needs?

Master’s awards are needed to establish a broad base of expertise within a country, but PhD awards are needed to promote knowledge and innovation. As above, needs vary from country to country, and, indeed, within sectors in countries; closer cooperation between the CSC and nominating agencies would be helpful.

It was noted that Distance Learning Scholarships met a specific developmental need, and that the longer completion times were tempered by the awardees being able to implement the skills and knowledge acquired immediately in their jobs.

Can we add value to the development process while award holders are in the UK?

A few outlandish suggestions were made – the CSC should build laboratories for Scholars’ use, for example – before it was agreed that any additional projects or policies should not be made at the expense of Scholarships. More reasonable suggestions included podcasts of CSC events (especially network events) for those unable to attend; encouraging two-week work placements at the end of award; and stronger networking with alumni and current Scholars from the year before – i.e. a 2009 Scholar chairing a small group session at the 2010 Welcome Day.



Are development interests always best served by recipients returning home directly after their awards?

There were many observant and sometimes honest contributions in this discussion. Comments about the interconnected global economy were made – a point emphasised also in DFID’s latest White Paper – and the focus should perhaps be on maximising global impact, as opposed to local benefit. A particularly pertinent point made was the role of remittances in development; even if an alumnus worked in a developed country post-award, there would still be a flow of remittances to their home country. One could (controversially!) argue that the sole purpose of scholarships should be to drive up the flow of remittances to developing countries.

More practically, there was consensus that a one-year work placement would be of great benefit, and would allow Scholars to better balance their career plans with their country’s needs.

