

Group discussion session report:

Scholarships and international relations

How sure can we be that hosting scholarships is good for international relations?

The majority of the group agreed that scholarships provide an opportunity to meet people from all over the world, contributing to the forging of worldwide networks and promoting interaction between people from various countries. The networks built by Scholars in the UK are based on cultural exchange through studying in an internationalised academic context. This experience brings about understanding between different cultures, opening dialogue and building bridges between different perspectives and ideas. This experience undoubtedly fosters international relations. However, the possibility of negative effects of international study (e.g. visa problems) was also mentioned.

It was also felt that the networks built while in the UK could lead to future long-term collaboration opportunities and the sharing of resources, though some Scholars were of the opinion that, once back home, their impact is lessened and the relations forged can slowly lose strength and momentum. Although it was generally felt that international relations reciprocation is increasing, some believed that more still needs to be done for to continue fostering these relations and networks post-award. One Scholar pointed out the need for more south-south networking relationships; the [DeLPHE](#) scheme was cited as an example of how these can be fostered.

What types of careers are most likely to enhance international relations objectives?

Scholars felt that many careers could contribute to the strengthening of international relations. All seemed to agree that the type of career was not so vital; what was important was the individual person (their character, personality) – leadership skills were mentioned as an important trait for the enhancing of international relations objectives.

In addition, those Scholars whose interest lay in the area of peace studies felt that more attention should be dedicated to this field. Those whose area of expertise lay in the area of telecommunications also felt that this was an important area of investment for international relations objectives, as it now drives the world.

How can future leaders best be identified when selecting Scholarship holders?

Scholarship selection criteria go beyond academic ability and applicants are also assessed on their participation in extracurricular activities, which often demonstrate their initiative and leadership potential, linked to an ability to influence public opinion and become ‘friends for Britain’.

Most Scholars agreed that participation in extracurricular activities demonstrates initiative and organisational qualities, but also acknowledged that leadership can also be a lifelong process



and dependent on context, for example, within countries, professions or communities. It was agreed that change through leadership can be brought about not only by excelling in education and having great academic merit, but also by the ability to engage in social activities and collaborate with others. Leadership can be about being the president, but it can also be about acting as a small agent of change.

Scholars felt strongly that the identification of leaders should go beyond the idea of creating ‘friends for Britain’, and should in fact be based on the concept of ‘shared values’ held by those living in the Commonwealth, for example, belief in democracy, human rights and development.

One Scholar suggested that selection committees in home countries should incorporate Commonwealth Scholarships alumni; nominating agencies could benefit from their input, drawn from their own experiences in the UK.

How can international relations benefits be measured?

92% of respondents to the recent alumni evaluation survey had maintained links with the UK, demonstrating the goodwill felt by most alumni towards their host country.

It was acknowledged that the measurement of benefits could only be based on individual experience, but most Scholars hoped that these individual links would be of benefit, regardless of relationships between politicians or nation states.

