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Report

**International scholarships: the case for investment,  
and how to ensure impact**

Monday 21 – Tuesday 22 March 2016 | WP1469



## Report

# International scholarships: the case for investment, and how to ensure impact

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### Executive summary

The overarching goal of this short conference was to discuss how to maximise the impact from international scholarships and explore new and innovative ideas for scholarship programmes in future.

The conference provided a good avenue for a vibrant and innovative exchange of ideas from a range of highly qualified professionals from diverse backgrounds, promoting an “out-of-the-box” atmosphere for discussion. Those participating included policy-makers, international scholarship providers and leaders within Higher Education (HE), academia and business, predominantly from the UK, with experts from a range of other international scholarship schemes.

International scholarships are evidently beneficial; scholars are an important source of talent, skills, and diverse thought to countries providing scholarships. Scholarships are also effective tools in promoting and enhancing a country’s soft power, investing in future leaders, providing access and equity, and increasing research excellence in a nation’s academic institutions.

Different international scholarship schemes have varying goals and expectations from the scholars and the programmes but some overlap of goals exists.

Best practice can be shared between different scholarship programmes, including on recruitment practices, evaluation and performance measurement, and alumni management, including career tracking and expertise in creating cohesive and active alumni groups, which can enhance return on investment. Different approaches can be shared, such as broadening the experiences for scholars during their scholarship, for example including creating events through a scholar’s time in the country to allow the scholars to feel included and enjoy immersive experiences.

Increased collaboration between different scholarship bodies can also prevent overlap, share scarce resources and help identify the scholar most suited to their respective schemes.

Scholarship providers can do more to leverage the capabilities of technology and big data to co-ordinate databases and to ensure that they are providing scholarships to the most eligible candidates based on suitability to the goals of the scholarship, merit and financial need.

“Increased collaboration between different scholarship bodies can prevent overlap, share scarce resources and help identify the scholar most suited to their respective schemes”

“Previous beneficiaries ...often want to give back to the community but have few official avenues for doing so”

Previous beneficiaries of international scholarships often want to give back to the community but have few official avenues for doing so. More could be done by scholarship providers to re-connect with the scholars, who can be great resources for mentorship and funding.

International scholarship bodies are urged to constantly keep up with changing times and to continually improve to ensure maximum potency. They are encouraged to think seriously about the millennials generation and their expectations of global mobility, and consider outbound scholarships.

Discussion at this meeting ranged from the personal impact international scholarships have on scholar recipients, the wider benefits of international scholarships, the need to enhance collaboration and co-ordination between various international scholarship providers, to the importance of maintaining a strong scholarship alumni.

## Introduction

1. There are a multitude of international scholarships designed for different purposes. Scholarships that have a longer operating history include the Rhodes Scholarship, the German Academic Exchange Service (“DAAD”) scholarships from Germany, the Fulbright Programme from the United States, and the Chevening, Commonwealth Scholarships and Marshall Scholarship from the United Kingdom.
2. Fast growing countries like China and Indonesia are also developing their own scholarship programmes, and receive considerable funding from their respective governments.

## The case for investment: benefits to different stakeholders

### Higher Education (“HE”) institutions

“International students bring different cultures and diversity of thought into countries giving the scholarships”

3. Postgraduate international students contribute to the academic prowess and knowledge base of the universities that they study in. A large proportion of graduate students conduct research at universities and are a strong force behind research excellence of many top tier universities in the country. An analysis of papers submitted by Math and Physical Sciences departments in Oxford University showed that approximately one third of the papers were co-authored by international graduate students.
4. International students bring different cultures and diversity of thought into countries giving the scholarships. This facilitates critical enquiry into existing teaching methods, prevailing academic theories and current structures of HE institutions, and provides a good opportunity for improvement and maintaining excellence of the HE institutions.
5. International scholars who return to their home countries perpetuate the benefits of the transformative academic experience they have experienced and help attract more talented intellectuals to move to these top tier institutions to conduct research. These intellectuals can include people selected for scholarships or self-funded scholars that are excited by the prospect of intellectual academic research. This produces a virtuous cycle that enhances the research excellence of the institutions and the countries providing the scholarships.
6. Attracting excellent talent is also a way to attract excellent teachers in academic institutions. This combination is essential to ground-breaking research and rankings.

## Private sector corporations

7. Education at high quality tertiary institutions provides international scholars with unique skill sets that are desired by corporations in the country. These international scholars also possess interesting international networks across multiple disciplines. Corporations domiciled in the country providing the scholarship can benefit both from the enhanced skill sets, global networks and differing viewpoints of these international scholars by employing them. If these corporations are restricted from hiring these scholars in the country due to visa restrictions, they can hire these scholars in other locations that the corporations have offices in. This way, local companies will continue to be able to tap top tier talent trained by top HE institutions in the United Kingdom.
8. Corporations that form good relationships with scholarship bodies via long term dialogue or the provision of co-funding can develop a good pipeline for top-tier talent that can greatly improve their economic prospects.
9. Corporations that co-fund prestigious scholarships with governments can receive brand affiliation benefits and thus attract more talent and local business opportunities. For corporations that wish to make initial forays into a new geography, that can be an extremely effective marketing tool.

## Government

10. The scope of investment from the governments in international scholarships ranges from soft power to building economic capacity and human capital. Some examples include China's investment in engineering scholarships in Africa, Mexico's investment in scholarships to support energy reform, and Indonesia's large scale investment in PhD training to build knowledge.
11. Scholars contribute to the economy whilst on their scholarship programme by spending on food, accommodation and other necessities. Some international scholars studying in the UK do not return to their home countries, finding employment in the UK and contributing income taxes.
12. International scholarship programmes that encourage international students to return to their home countries help in the development of talent pool of developing countries. Education at top HE institutions in developed countries expose international students to the efficiency of institutions in developed countries and provide these students with advanced knowledge that they can take back to their home countries. These returning scholars bring back best practices and help develop local institutions, contributing to a multiplier effect. This is a highly effective way of providing indirect developmental aid to developing countries as compared to expensive trickle-down foreign aid packages.
13. Scholars build friendships and create good memories from their time in the UK. Coupled with their exposure to the efficiency of British HE institutions and infrastructure, they develop positive views of the country, contributing to the soft power of the UK. A UK report, commissioned by the Department for Business Innovation and Skills, reported that 84% of overseas scholars who had studied in the UK retained personal and professional connections in the UK, and over 90% reported that their perception of the UK was more positive as a result of their period studying here.
14. Reports from the UK Higher Education International Unit shows that international students studying in the UK are highly satisfied with the education they receive. The UK is the most highly recommended destination of study amongst English speaking countries and has the highest ratings for undergraduate and postgraduate taught satisfaction. This contributes to promoting "Brand Britain" as a leader in innovation and education.

## Scholars and alumni

15. By uprooting themselves and moving to the UK for studies for at least a year, scholars gain the opportunity for an immersive cultural experience, on top of the academic

“returning scholars bring back best practices and help develop local institutions, contributing to a multiplier effect”

knowledge and skills that they will gain from their studies. They receive opportunities to interact extensively with people from different cultures across the globe, and build formidable global networks.

“Scholars and alumni gain recognition, prestige and pride .... This can improve their standing in their local societies, give them access and allow them to achieve things that were previously impossible in their home countries”

16. By studying in the UK scholars gain fluency in the English language if that is not their native language. Scholars can also amass a bedrock of insights for understanding the UK politically, socially and culturally.
17. International scholarships help to create a community from disparate groups of talented people from across the globe. The power of diversity is harnessed by the commonality of the scholarship experience, allowing them to build a network combining knowledge, global perspectives and the understanding of different cultures and traditions. Alumni can achieve global aspirations more easily with international contacts.
18. Scholarships can be extremely impactful to impressionable students with financial needs. The time spent during a scholarship is very important.
19. Scholars and alumni gain recognition, prestige and pride by receiving well-known international scholarships. This can improve their standing in their local societies, give them access and allow them to achieve things that were previously impossible in their home countries.
20. The UK is an open society that views knowledge as a universal resource to be discovered, harnessed and shared. Some scholars might gain significant intellectual freedom by coming to the UK to study versus studying in their home countries.
21. This community is not restricted to the current batch of scholars, but across cohorts. Technological improvements have greatly improved the abilities of alumni to connect across different digital platforms, allowing many new dialogues stemming from the commonality of their scholarships. Some examples include thematic conversations on LinkedIn.
22. The large number of scholars across cohorts over the years provides a huge network from disparate professions depending on the area of study of scholars during their time in the UK. This provides opportunities for forming specific professional networks within the scholar-wide network, allowing more opportunities for collaboration and career progression.
23. Inspired with a sense of giving back from the scholarships, alumni are spurred to help millions across the globe via social entrepreneurship. Alumni can achieve this much more easily with a strong global network in politics, business and academia. For example, alumni from developing countries that returned to their home countries can tap on their networks in developed countries to help in their social entrepreneurship causes at home.

## Ensuring impact

“Different scholarship providers should ..work together to reduce overlap and maximise effectiveness”

### Streamline value proposition

24. The first step to ensuring maximal impact of international scholarships is to acknowledge that different scholarships have very different goals. It is important to have a clear understanding of each scholarship’s value proposition.
25. Different scholarship providers should then work together to reduce overlap and maximise effectiveness.

### Time the giving of scholarships

“Big data can be used to identify best methods”

26. Big data can be used to identify best methods. For example, timing of the scholarship in a scholar’s life is important. The best age to provide postgraduate scholarships to students is debated, but arguably in their early 20s when a majority of people are most receptive to new perspectives. Also, most people have not established themselves financially and socially in their early 20s; a scholarship grant would greatly enhance

their prospects, be a great aid to their financial status and have a lasting impact of their lives.

27. International scholarships for long term programmes like degrees or PhDs can help immerse students into the cultures and traditions of local society.

“Scholarships work best when they are “full and fast””

#### **Ensure attractive scholarship characteristics**

28. Scholarships work best when they are “full and fast” it was suggested. Full scholarships tend to have a greater impact on scholars’ lives. This can give the scholar greater affection towards the UK and their respective HE institutions. It would also imbibe a sense of duty to give back to the scholarship scheme or society at large.
29. There is also a need on the part of the scholarship providers to make the ‘sense of duty’ more explicit to scholarship recipients/alumni.

#### **Increase character and leadership building**

“invest in broader service, character and leadership development programmes during the scholarship”

30. A number of schemes invest in broader service, character and leadership development programmes during the scholarship. Speaker series and internship opportunities should also be provided it was suggested. This helps develop the relationship between the scholarship body and the scholar and also helps to hone the scholar’s potential to be a useful member to the society at large. The scholar would also be inculcated with a sense of giving and would perpetuate a virtuous cycle for further generations of scholars.
31. Scholars can be linked to local communities to help out in community service schemes. This allows them to be more involved in the broader community and also gives them an opportunity to give back and build personal relations with locals. Locals also gain by developing a better understanding of ‘foreigners’.
32. Effort should be made to develop scholars into thought leaders and influencers that can effect positive change. In addition to benefits to their local societies and the world, people would identify such scholar leaders with their scholarships and link their success to the education they have received in the UK. This further fulfils the soft power aspect of the international scholarships. Some of the scholars might write influential books that will indirectly perpetuate the prestige and merits of an education in the UK.
33. Germany’s scholarship offer includes internships at international institutions which also works towards their long term aims for influence in multi-lateral environments.

“develop scholars into thought leaders and influencers that can effect positive change”

#### **Increase engagement with alumni**

“Scholarship providers should aim to engage alumni at various points in their lives”

34. Scholarship providers should aim to engage alumni at various points in their lives, through alumni events held locally or in various locations across the world. Contact with scholars should not end or be drastically reduced after the scholarship - scholars should continually feel affiliated to the scholarship after the completion of their studies. This would allow them to continue championing the cause and to be open to opportunities to contribute back to the scholarship via mentorship of new scholars for example.
35. Scholarship providers should facilitate the building of sub-groups of alumni based on more specific commonalities such as geography, knowledge expertise and profession in addition to national level. For example, a Math students sub-group, or an ASEAN students sub-group. Commonalities would help alumni in building relationships and collaborating more easily.
36. Scholarship providers can work with HE institutions through their databases to track down previous scholars that have lost touch, include them in new databases maintained digitally, and include them in activities. Many alumni are very keen on taking part in reunion activities or networking sessions with other alumni but have not been kept in the loop since their studies. Many are also very keen to give something

back but do not know of avenues to do so. Re-engagement with such alumni would be very helpful in building networks across cohorts and also increasing the sources for donation.

### **Leverage technology for alumni engagement**

37. Technology should be leveraged to improve on existing databases to track the career progression of scholars individually in an effective manner. There should be constant updates to the databases. This allows the opportunity to solve specific problems by approaching scholars according to their field of expertise.
38. Private sector consultancies such as McKinsey & Co and the Boston Consulting Group have good digital platforms for alumni and various light-touch methods for staying in touch. International scholarships can emulate the best practices from these platforms.

### **Encourage philanthropy**

39. Scholars that feel strongly for the scholarship scheme due to their own positive experience might be inclined to contribute funds to the scholarship. Philanthropy is growing to be a significant source of funding for scholarships.
40. A larger number of talent benefiting from scholarships also constitute increased impact. The biggest reason international students that receive offers for postgraduate studies in HE institutions in the UK but turn them down is due to the lack of funding. Increasing the number of scholarship schemes and the quantum of each scholarship would increase the number of scholars. This can be done through matching funds that invite philanthropists to be involved in the global draw of the education system in the United Kingdom. For example, the Oxford University Press contributes income to a matching scheme for postgraduates. There is also an increasing interest from donors in contributing to scholarships.

### **Encourage co-funding arrangements with foreign governments and the private sector**

41. More co-funding opportunities between the UK government and foreign countries that wish to send their citizens to the UK for further studies should be explored to increase the funding pool. The UK government should also explore establishing matching funds with local universities or offer fee waivers for international scholars to a greater extent than currently possible.
42. There should be increased co-funding opportunities for private sector corporations. The private sector can be willing donors due to their corporate social responsibility agendas. There is also a myriad of benefits for corporations as explored above.
43. It is essential to have a long term view of private sector engagement, beyond identifying them purely as funders. Interaction with corporations should be meaningful by understanding each corporation's needs that include public relation benefits, marketing goals, corporate social responsibility agendas, talent acquisition and human capital development in geographies with capability deficits. There should be more co-ordination between governmental bodies to understand which body is talking to which corporation to prevent overlap and conflicting goals. Local engagement with local branches of multi-national corporations is more effective than global engagement with headquarters. Expectations should be made clear at the onset that co-funded scholarships are to develop a scholar according to the curriculum of the scholar's HE institution, instead of developing a scholar's skillsets based on the corporation's specific needs.
44. With the expansion of private sector engagement, international scholarship providers can set up job portals for the scholars in collaboration with corporations to improve their employment prospects. There should also be networking events between corporations, alumni working in such corporations and present scholars to boost dialogue and engagement.

“Philanthropy is growing to be a significant source of funding for scholarships”

“essential to have a long term view of private sector engagement”

“a national process for assessment of the financial need of postgraduate students is recommended”

### **Improve scholarship administration by the government**

45. Given the rapid increase in numbers of postgraduate programmes in the UK a national process for assessment of the financial need of postgraduate students is recommended, on top of the existing process for undergraduate levels. The assessment is currently conducted at university level. This would improve the efficiency in earmarking candidates for international scholarships.
46. There is a multitude of scholarship options provided by universities themselves, but they are not as publicised as flagship government scholarship programmes. There should be increased co-ordination between the government and universities to promote their scholarships a part of the “GREAT” education campaign to ensure maximal numbers of talent take up the scholarships to come to the UK. The Australian unified approach towards advertising scholarships was shared.

### **Review application and interview process**

47. The scholarship process should be swift and decisive. For Masters students it was suggested that interviews for UK Chevening scholarships should be conducted early with offer decisions made before Christmas, versus the April deadline for many scholarships from other countries. This would ensure the scholarships are given to top talents.
48. The application process should be simple and quick. Some possible suggestions include having one mobile application for all the international scholarships in the UK, having a central dashboard that aggregates all international scholarships, and standardising the questions asked.
49. More alumni can be involved in the interview process of scholars and work together with scholarship bodies to evaluate potential candidates to prevent any form of unconscious bias.
50. Certain scholarships have many eligibility requirements that might reduce the standards of the scholarship applicants in a bid to promote equity. In some cases, applicants are only eligible if they have not completed a prior Masters degree and have not received a prior scholarship. This might severely reduce the pool of eligible applicants in certain countries and hence reduce the standard of scholars. Scholarship providers should look into their eligibility requirements and balance between maintaining standards and ensuring fairness. Australia’s schemes promotes access and particularly encourages disabled people and those in rural and remote areas.
51. The question was raised of ‘repeat users’ of scholarships. Are these more beneficial to the providers overall? Some research of this could be needed.

“one mobile application for all the international scholarships in the UK”

### **Support outbound scholarships**

52. Outbound scholarships, which the UK government sponsored schemes are not currently investing in, was a popular talking point. The New Colombo Plan of the Australian government, was highlighted, supporting Australian undergraduates to study and undertake internships in the Indo-Pacific region which means young Australians understand their region.
53. It was suggested that more investments should be made in outbound scholarships at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels.
54. Outbound scholarships give students from the UK opportunities to know foreign countries in depth. By becoming embedded and dependent on the foreign country scholars can generate global perspectives, build connections across the globe, and perceive the UK from the outside by looking back at their home country from the lens of the locals. This way scholars can also identify points of improvements for the UK.
55. Outbound scholarships, particularly to countries that students would not go to without the scholarship, is a hugely valuable resource. This develops citizens that understand a

“more investments should be made in outbound scholarships at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels”



“Outbound scholarships, particularly to countries that students would not go to without the scholarship, is a hugely valuable resource”

foreign nation from a perspective of a local. These scholars have opportunities to become more fluent in foreign languages, find out about more closed societies first hand, develop networks of acquaintances that can give an extraordinary broad sense of what is going on in the country that might not be well known to many people in the West and hence is of acute interest to Western policy makers. Scholars can also be a bridge between academics from more closed societies and academics from open societies, facilitating a powerful exchange of ideas.

56. At the undergraduate level, high level commitment at government and education institutions should be available to urge local students to study abroad for example through the Erasmus Programme.
57. At the postgraduate level, the UK government could develop programmes that take the best practices of outbound scholarships such as the Fulbright programme in the United States, the Australian New Colombo Plan and the Carlo-Schmid programme under the DAAD in Germany.

### **Future approaches and collaboration**

58. There were calls for increased collaboration across schemes because there are too few scholarships in general; ‘competition is ridiculous’ someone said. There could be potential to share programme costs which could work across schemes on several initiatives.
59. There are opportunities for new innovation with scholarship schemes. For example the Fulbright triangular awards are for UK people studying in US and US people studying in UK to then do research and implementation work in Africa.
60. As Scholarship providers plan for the future they need to think seriously about the so-called ‘millennials’ generation and their expectations of global mobility, and to capture and include the voices of self-funded international students as well as those who are lucky enough to secure a scholarship.

### **Conclusion**

International scholarships are an effective means of enhancing academic excellence, building economic capacity and forging strong diplomatic relations.

There is a huge willingness for international collaboration to maximise the returns on scholarships, to learn from best practices, leverage on technology, refine existing approaches and to ensure that scholarships continue to improve lives not just in the near future but also in perpetuity.

### **Alexander Han Yao Guang, Chevening/Mansion House Scholar at The University of Cambridge**

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