Chapter 7

Building Bridges for Education in the Commonwealth: Issues in Student Mobility

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Each has something to learn from others; each has something to give.
Report of the Commonwealth Education Conference, 1959

1 Introduction

The first task (and first action) of the first Commonwealth Education Conference in 1959 was to set up the Commonwealth Scholarship and Fellowship Plan. Exchanges of persons and of knowledge have remained at the heart of Commonwealth educational concerns ever since and have featured prominently in all the subsequent education conferences. Most of the previous chapters have alluded to aspects of such exchanges. The purpose of this chapter is to trace the main Commonwealth initiatives in student mobility, their rationales and challenges, and also other achievements.

The underlying story is one of modest success, with the main initiatives sustained over 40 years by a co-operative Commonwealth ideal, of which for some of the period Sir Shridath Ramphal, second Secretary-General, was a strong proponent. But this is counterpointed by an alternative, less altruistic, view often associated with Margaret Thatcher, British Education Minister and later Prime Minister, in which international student exchange was viewed primarily from an economic standpoint as an instrument of aid policy and more broadly as a component of international trade. These differing views were argued out especially in the Commonwealth Standing Committee on Student Mobility and Higher Education Co-operation between 1981 and 1994. That committee was the arena for a struggle for a favourable fee regime for Commonwealth students, but although it failed in

that struggle, it was also (as said in Chapter 1) the progenitor of some important new Commonwealth activities relevant to higher education interchange: the Commonwealth of Learning; the Commonwealth Higher Education Programme; and the Commonwealth Universities Study Abroad Consortium.

With the collapse of the standing committee, a new policy-making climate gained ground: higher education was taken to be a commodity and the main Commonwealth host countries began to use student mobility to further regional interests, such as that of Australia in the Pacific or Britain in the European Union – to the detriment of their Commonwealth loyalties. Forty years on from the original Oxford meeting the context for international student exchange has changed not only in the policy and economic frameworks, but also because of technological advance – which has meant that the movement of *knowledge* can be an alternative to the movement of *people*, with the evolution of distance learning into borderless learning.

These are the main themes of the student mobility story. The chief constant has remained the CSFP – a continuing success story in spite of all obstacles, and an important instrument for strengthening academic institutions, reinforcing common academic standards and values across the Commonwealth, and enabling access to a wider scholarly world for poor and small countries. The Plan was mentioned and most recently endorsed in the Halifax Statement of December 2000, together with a declaration of the Commonwealth education ministers' belief in 'The value of academic interchange as well as student and knowledge mobility.'

2 The Diverse Nature of Educational Interchange in the Commonwealth

The most prominent exchange activities have been in tertiary education and have involved students from universities and other higher education institutions, so that here we will largely be studying mobility in that sector of education. It is important, however, to remember that other sectors of education also thrive on such exchanges and that there are many less formal agencies in the Commonwealth promoting them, even though their work is on a fairly small scale. The Commonwealth Youth Exchange Council, for instance, based in Britain, encourages educational visits by young people, while the Commonwealth Relations Trust, whose purpose is 'to promote understanding and communication between the countries of the Commonwealth', offers travel bursaries and fellowships to adults, particularly trade unionists, broadcasters and educators.

There are very well-established mechanisms for exchange of school teachers (this also was a subject which absorbed the attention of the first Commonwealth Education Conference). One organisation, the League for the Exchange of Commonwealth Teachers (LECT) has a history going back to 1901 and in a century of activity has arranged some 25,000 direct exchanges, with teachers swapping posts. Based in London, it is governed by a 'Declaration of Trust' and although it has close relations with the UK education ministries, it has resolutely kept its inde-

pendent status. Countries in the LECT scheme in mid-2000 were: Australia, the Bahamas, Bangladesh, Barbados, Bermuda, Canada, The Gambia, Ghana, India, Jamaica, Kenya, Malawi, Malaysia, Malta, New Zealand, Pakistan, Sierra Leone, Singapore, South Africa, Tanzania, Trinidad and Tobago, United Kingdom, Zambia and Zimbabwe.

Moreover, there are several Commonwealth professional associations which are school-related, such as CASTME, described in Chapter 4, and which are instruments for interchange between teachers, educational administrators and curriculum developers through conferences and other collaborative activities. These and other organisations relevant to exchange in all sectors of education are listed in Appendix 2.

The less formal types of exchange, for short courses or research visits or for professional up-dating, have not been easily quantifiable over the years, but they represent a considerable range of educational contacts, in school education, in higher and adult education and also in the museum and library sectors. Some of the activities they generate have been noted by Commonwealth Education Conferences, but many take place almost unnoticed. There is obvious scope for a study of their scale and features. Here, however, we will be concerned with formal degree and diploma courses, mainly offered by public institutions (although it should be noted that the private sector is beginning to play a larger part in international higher education).

Intra-Commonwealth higher education mobility is partly spontaneous, and partly brought about by conscious bridge-building by members. This chapter is about that conscious bridge-building, as part of the 40-year CCEM story. There is also a story connected to the Commonwealth Fund for Technical Co-operation. The CFTC, as part of its support for member countries, builds in training in other parts of the Commonwealth and has a strong track record in South–South interchange for training. Its contribution is part of the mobility picture, but is outside the scope of this book. It is mentioned here for completeness and also because the Fund has played a role in helping to finance some of the recent initiatives in intra-Commonwealth higher education exchange.

3 Student Mobility at Tertiary Level: Its Perceived Special Significance

International educational transactions of all kinds have been seen, throughout the 40-odd years since the first Commonwealth Education Conference, in a favourable light. Student mobility has been valued for its contribution to development, its role in capacity-building and its unique part in maintaining the Commonwealth relationship. The CSFP was projected in 1959 to 'play an important part in maintaining and strengthening the common ideals on which the Commonwealth is founded' (see Appendix 3 for full quotation). In 1987, the then Secretary-General of the Commonwealth, Shridath Ramphal, saw the development of educational co-operation as marking the Commonwealth's 'further evolution towards a truly poly-

centric organisation'. In 1994, 'the Commonwealth Ministers of Education in Islamabad reaffirmed the centrality of educational co-operation to the Commonwealth relationship. It is the glue which binds the Commonwealth together ...'. (Some observers might see an irony in this last comment emerging from a meeting which agreed to close down the Standing Committee on Student Mobility and Higher Education Co-operation – see Section 6 below.)

The nature of the partnership in educational exchange was, however, not perceived in an identical way throughout the years or in different Commonwealth countries. Ramphal's polycentrism was not a concept current in the countries with most resources, some of whose leaders saw a project like the CSFP as an instrument of aid or technical assistance, however benevolent. At the Canberra conference of 1971, the Australian Minister of Education and Science quoted with approval from a speech made by Vincent Massey, Governor-General of Canada at the Ottawa conference of 1964: 'Aid for education is not really aid at all – it is a form of partnership. Education is a true meeting-ground for donor and receiver'. This is rather a different perspective from that quoted at the head of this chapter. It becomes questionable in any case when the pattern is one in which countries may be both donors and receivers, both hosts to international students and senders of their own students to other countries.

The case for tertiary student mobility in a Commonwealth context was fairly thoroughly thrashed out in a book published by the Secretariat in 1994, based on a workshop held, under Commonwealth auspices, in Singapore in 1992. Participants were conscious of the widening imbalance in access to knowledge between countries of high and low human development and also the greater cynicism about partnership in some of the countries of high human development.

Part of the discussion went as follows:

> *Within the Commonwealth, much of its partnership activity is higher education related. Almost all of the Commonwealth Professional Associations bring together professional people trained in higher education institutions and whose capacity to understand each other stems from a comparability in their training. Within universities themselves, there has been a sense of common heritage in system, standards and generally, language. It is therefore a matter of great sensitivity that higher education across the Commonwealth is seen to be genuinely open to exchange and interchange. In the eyes of many of the countries of the South, the association might stand or fall by its success in keeping up a fairer flow of people, both students and academics.*

An additional point strongly relevant to a political grouping which includes many small countries was that:

> *The movement of students has a very high priority for the many small Commonwealth nations in any case, since they may have no university within their borders, as is the case with the Gambia, or their higher education institution may not have the resources to cater for more than a few disciplines or for any postgraduate work.*

On the other hand, the climate in the 1990s led to doubts in some countries. The late Dr Elizabeth Dines of Australia noted that:

> *An initial reaction from hard-pressed policy-makers is ... likely to be:*
> - *How will increasing student mobility in general benefit my university/country?*
> - *Are there any particular advantages in a Commonwealth scheme?*
> - *Will the benefits outweigh the costs?*
>
> *These questions cannot be swept aside, for there is no point in turning to the basics of implementation ... if there is not at the outset the political will at national levels to set such a scheme in place. The extent to which the proposal captures the interest or imagination of governments and participating institutions will be directly related to their –perceived advantages from student mobility'.*

She went on to give 'a litany of potential disadvantages' and suggested that:

> *... making the case for a student mobility scheme that is restricted to participants from Commonwealth countries will be even more difficult. For many member governments the Commonwealth is no longer a 'salient category'. Australia and Canada are both actively pursuing economic ties with Asia, and the United Kingdom is increasingly looking towards an expanding and economically vibrant Europe. Singapore is extensively involved in joint ventures and development projects with countries throughout Asia and is a member, like Malaysia, of ASEAN, an economic grouping which owes nothing to Commonwealth ties ....*

In spite of these and other negatives, Dines at the end came down with a positive case for her own country Australia to support Commonwealth student mobility programmes, based on the argument that:

1. A Commonwealth network of student exchanges provides a global network;
2. A formal framework is already established;
3. A common language is used for instruction;
4. There is a shared academic culture.

Some of these themes will be revisited later in the chapter.

4 Student Mobility in Context

During the past 40 years, international student mobility has increased substantially. There have been periods when the increase was checked (see Section 6), but the continuing trend is upwards. There is difficulty in obtaining comparable statistics, but UNESCO does provide a rough global picture annually. During the lifetime of the Commonwealth Standing Committee on Student Mobility, it commissioned a number of case studies and collected some useful statistics. Recently, the Council for Education in the Commonwealth with UKCOSA has produced a

report based on substantial statistical research by Kees Maxey and the picture which emerged from its findings is described in the rest of this section.

International student mobility increased most considerably in the 1990s, with countries which stand high on the Human Development Index (HDI) of the UNDP predominating as hosts, and high and medium HDI countries being the principal senders. Low HDI countries account for only a very small proportion of international student flows and host international students on an insignificant scale. In the world as a whole, the USA is the largest individual host, receiving a third of all international students, but Australia and the UK also attract large numbers to their universities and colleges. Patterns of student flow reflect traditional national ties as well as other factors, such as language – including a very strong demand both for studying English and for courses where English is the medium of instruction.

The Commonwealth's share of all students travelling abroad for higher education has declined in relative terms, but some of its members have become more important players among the world's host countries receiving international students. Commonwealth hosts have, however, recruited a majority of their international students from countries outside the Commonwealth. In 1990, the five principal host countries within the Commonwealth took in 44% of their international students from other Commonwealth nations; but by 1996 that proportion had dropped to 36%. Notably, in 1980, the UK received half its international students from the Commonwealth and only 10% from the European Union; but by the late 1990s, the Commonwealth proportion of the UK international intake had dropped to 30%, while almost half of the intake came from the European Union.

The reason for this change was the consolidation of the European Union. The initial establishing treaty of the European Economic Community (the EU's predecessor), agreed in Rome in 1957, and the major treaty setting up the Union, agreed in Maastricht in 1992, bound members to the principle that any EU citizen, as part of their rights could study for a longer or shorter period in another EU country for the same fee as any national of that country. The principle was tested and upheld in a court in Belgium in 1980. The basic ideas on educational interchange in Europe are similar to those of the Commonwealth and are stated in the Maastricht Treaty:

Community action shall be aimed at:

- *developing the European dimension in education, particularly through the teaching and dissemination of the languages of the Member States;*
- *encouraging mobility of students and teachers, inter alia by encouraging the academic recognition of diplomas and periods of study;*
- *promoting co-operation between educational establishments;*
- *developing exchanges of information and experience on issues common to the education systems of the Member States;*

- *encouraging the development of youth exchanges and of exchanges of socio – educational instructors;*
- *encouraging the development on distance education.*

These ideas have been operationalised by a variety of exchange schemes for universities, including SOCRATES, LEONARDO and ERASMUS (as well as by youth exchange programmes). For European policy-makers, the increase in student mobility is part of a broader agenda for social cohesion in the EU, and there are signs that there will be further efforts to increase student flows across the union. An EU Green Paper on Innovation emphasises personal mobility, particularly between the research world, universities and industry and says roundly: 'This is one of Europe's most remarkable paradoxes: goods, capital and services move around more easily than people and know-how'. This all makes for obvious tensions in the UK between its obligations to Europe and its obligations to the Commonwealth, and has led to the uncomfortable situation where students from high human development countries in Europe have access to British higher education at much less cost than students from low human development countries in the Commonwealth.

In spite of all this, at the end of the twentieth century intra-Commonwealth mobility was in a reasonably healthy state. It accounted for 12% of global mobility by 1996 (a rise of 3% since 1990) and, overall, 44% of all Commonwealth inter-

Table 1. International students by country of origin (by HD level) by groups and by hosting regions (1996)

Countries of origin	Host Regions										
	Africa		North America		Asia		Europe		Oceania		All
High-HD	1,222	0%	217,075	36%	6,109	1%	342,422	56%	39,348	6%	606,176
% of total	11		43		9		50		40		44
Medium-HD	4,238	1%	225,306	39%	45,920	8%	255,593	44%	44,851	8%	575,908
% of total	37		45		65		38		46		42
Low HD	2,990	5%	18,823	30%	5,625	9%	33,408	53%	1,864	3%	62,710
% of total	26%		4		8		5		2		5
HD Unspecified	3,129	3%	43,429	37%	12,792	11%	47,336	40%	11,191	9%	117,877
% of total	27		9		18		7		12		9
Total	11,579	1%	504,633	37%	70,446	5%	678,759	50%	97,254	7%	1,362,671
Commonwealth	628	0%	149,009	50%	9,217	3%	94,081	31%	47,970	16%	300,905
% of total	5		30		13		14		49		22
Non-Commonwealth	10,951	1%	355,624	33%	61,229	6%	584,678	55%	49,284	5%	1,061,766
% of total	95		70		87		86		51		78
European Union	49	0%	41,855	15%	712	0%	217,718	83%	1,036	0%	261,370
% of total	0		8		1		32		1		19

Source: UNESCO

national students were studying in another Commonwealth country in the late 1990s. In the Commonwealth there are five main host countries: Australia, Canada, India, New Zealand and the UK. By 1996 they were taking in collectively over 350,000 students from elsewhere, of whom just over one-third were from the Commonwealth. The main Commonwealth sending countries in the 1990s were Brunei Darussalam, Hong Kong (before its change of political status), Malaysia and Singapore; their students made up 60% of all Commonwealth students going abroad. As in the world at large, so also in the Commonwealth, students from low HDI countries have recently had comparatively little access to international higher education.

Table 1 illustrates the points made above.

Against this general background of upward trends in international student mobility over the last 40 years, we will now look at specific Commonwealth initiatives. The most significant one is the Commonwealth Scholarship and Fellowship Plan, which is seen by most observers as the education flagship.

5 Commonwealth Flagship – The Commonwealth Scholarship and Fellowship Plan

a. Origins and Rationale

It might come as a surprise that the idea of the CSFP germinated in a Commonwealth Trade and Economic Conference. That meeting, in Montreal in 1958, was held at a time when membership of the Commonwealth was about to be enlarged by the arrival of a cohort of developing countries and when economists were beginning to raise awareness of development issues. Participants in the Montreal meeting were agreed that education was a basic element of social and economic development – the first time that this view was expressed in a major Commonwealth forum. The notion of an awards programme was accepted at Montreal and initially three-quarters of the awards were to be funded by the UK and Canada (one-half by UK and one-quarter by Canada).

The baton was then picked up at the Oxford conference of 1959, where, (as already said), the establishment of a Commonwealth Scholarship and Fellowship programme was that conference's first agenda. While the rationale related to development was picked up, the main vision was broadened. The text of the conference's report on the CSFP will be found at Appendix 3. In that report was the following statement of fundamental purposes:

'The Plan, based on a common effort and partnership between all the countries of the Commonwealth, will play an important part in maintaining and strengthening the common ideals on which the Commonwealth is founded. It will enrich each country of the Commonwealth by enabling an increasing number of its abler citizens to share the wide range of educational resources available throughout the Commonwealth and thus promote equality of opportunity at the highest level'.10

The vision was one of benefit to the Commonwealth as a whole through the

strengthening of common ideals and of benefit to member countries through access to a pool of educational resources. The word 'enrich' seems to have been used here in a wider sense than the economic. Equality of opportunity was left undefined as to whether it was opportunity between member states or between individual students. Probably the authors meant both; the quotation at the head of this chapter seems to be about polities and individuals. The thinking about individuals certainly extended to gender equality, since the awards were to be open to men and women (although the general discourse was to be of 'men' and 'he' in the CEC reports on the programme for several years ahead).

In the euphoria of setting up what was undoubtedly an extraordinarily visionary scheme, the 1959 conference members expressed an expectation that 'within a few years of its inception the programme would cover some thousand Commonwealth scholars and fellows'. It was a period of optimism in both education and the world economy, so that the actual target of a thousand awards was seen by the founders as modest and they expressed hopes for its further expansion.

At the same time, the founders of the scheme, through a Commonwealth committee (chaired by F. G. Curtis) made very practical financial and administrative dispositions. Starting from the rationale summarised in the quotation above, they stated that educational interchange between all parts of the Commonwealth 'is essential if we are all to get the best out of the Plan and to share to the full the benefits of the special experience and facilities which our countries possess'. They wrote of 'the development of a multilateral trade in ideas'.

The Plan was to be governed by a set of straightforward principles:

1. The Plan should be additional to, and distinct from, any other plan already in operation.
2. The Plan should be based on mutual co-operation and sharing of educational experience among all the countries of the Commonwealth.
3. The Plan should be sufficiently flexible to take account of the diverse and changing needs of the countries of the Commonwealth.
4. While the Plan will be Commonwealth wide, it will have to be operated on the basis of a series of bilateral agreements to allow for the necessary flexibility.
5. The awards should be designed to recognise and promote the highest standards of intellectual achievement.

The basis of the scheme was to be for two sorts of award: scholarships, usually for graduates to proceed further, either to another first degree or to a postgraduate course; and fellowships for 'scholars of high distinction and established reputation to enable them to undertake research and perhaps teaching'. Scholarships were to be for two years and usually the awards would be 'inward' – that is to be held in the country offering the award. Sending countries were to nominate candidates, but

final selection was to be the responsibility of a special agency in the receiving country. In the case of small countries with no higher education institutions of their own, students were received by the offering nation to do a full undergraduate course. There was a general responsibility on the receiving country and host universities to provide for the reception and welfare of scholars and there was a general obligation on scholars to return to their own countries at the end of their courses.

The work of the founders of CSFP has stood the test of time. The five principles which they laid down have been reiterated at subsequent Commonwealth Education Conferences and the dual framework of scholarships and fellowships has continued. Where challenges have been perceived to the working of the plan, they have been perceived largely as failures to live up to it rather than flaws in the principles themselves or the scheme itself, as we shall see in the next sub-section.

There was one omission in the 1959 expectations for the plan. New university colleges were already established in a number of Commonwealth countries on the eve of independence and there was an expansion of universities in already independent India and Pakistan. The potential of the CSFP for what later came to be called capacity-building was not fully recognised in 1959. Another task of the Oxford Conference, however, was to consider the intra-Commonwealth supply of teachers and there was a brief allusion to university teachers in that committee's report, which perhaps foreshadowed the need for the nurturing of indigenous university staff while nationals from elsewhere in the Commonwealth temporarily filled the positions.

b. Evolution of the CSFP and some Challenges Encountered

The CSFP was the subject of regular reports to CECs/CCEMs in the next 40 years and every ten years it underwent a review commissioned by the Commonwealth Secretariat for consideration by member governments. On each occasion, some technical issues came up, such as the extension of the length of awards to allow for doctoral study (New Delhi, 1962) or the demand for a register of past Commonwealth scholars (Nairobi, 1987). The flexibility of the scheme and the existence of a co-ordinating structure through the Association of Commonwealth Universities enabled such changes to be made.

New emphases were also occasionally put on the purposes of the plan. By 1968 in Lagos, awareness of the CSFP as an instrument for university staff development was articulated and energised by the British government's initiative in offering 100 new awards for postgraduate training of lecturers in medical schools. In Canberra in 1971, there was a request for more focus on rural development needs when scholars were selected – part of the general dialogue at that meeting on universities and development.

Additionally, there were several challenges encountered as the plan evolved. They were continuing issues for Commonwealth conferences and member governments.

First was the challenge of numbers of awards. The original target of 1000,

adopted at Montreal, was already met by 1966. At the Accra conference in 1977, it was decided to increase numbers to 1500 and at Nicosia in 1984 the Secretary-General pleaded for member governments to reach that target. His plea was based on an appeal to the values of internationalism: 'if the principle of internationalism falters now, then nothing is safe from self-centred destructive nationalism'. It succeeded in evoking pledges increasing the total number of awards to 1650. The current goal is 2000 scholarships and fellowships for the new millennium. Achieving the numbers has proved less easy than the Oxford conference envisaged, with its euphoric 'several thousand'. One reason is probably because the cost of an award has increased, particularly in the countries which now charge full-cost fees.

Related to numbers is the challenge of the distribution of awards. The 1959 founders envisaged a sharing of educational experience between all parts of the Commonwealth and later voices also advocated the offering of scholarships by all members. There was a built-in imbalance at the start, with two countries of high human development – UK and Canada – generously pledged to subscribe three-quarters of the awards – although Canada never quite fulfilled its allotted quota. By the Accra conference in 1977, it was observed that the main providers were the developed countries, so that the student flow was from developing to developed. Since then, there have been recommendations for more South–South awards and pleas for smaller member countries of the Commonwealth to provide at least one or two awards. Meanwhile, the United Kingdom is not politically comfortable with being the largest contributor. Over 40 years, 24 member countries have from time to time offered awards and some which have dropped out are showing an interest in once more participating. The ten countries/regional institutions at present providing awards are: Brunei, Canada, India, Jamaica, New Zealand, University of the South Pacific, Sri Lanka, Trinidad, the UK and (in principle) Uganda. New or returned participants in the plan (as hosts) are: Australia, Malaysia and Mauritius; and there are positive signals too from Cameroon, Malta, Nigeria and South Africa. At the end of the 1990s the nominating/sending countries numbered 49 out of the total Commonwealth membership of 65, and there are very few countries that have not had some award-winners over the 40 years. So the distribution of beneficiaries is quite wide.

These developments show that there is continuing interest in the CSFP and that it is valued across the Commonwealth.

There are, of course, problems in applying the founding principles. While it is generally agreed that there should be some rebalancing of student flows, there is sometimes an unwillingness on the part of the students from the North to take up awards in the South. Some have doubts about real or perceived issues of security, hygiene of accommodation, food and health. On the other side of the coin, there are sometimes problems for smaller and/or poorer countries in offering scholarships. Some of these were described by Dr Peter Dzvimbo of Zimbabwe in his contribution to the Singapore workshop on Commonwealth student mobility in 1992. He explained that rapid expansion of universities and increasing demand put pres-

sure on them to find places for Zimbabwean students and that the parallel shortage of staff had increased the pressures. In such conditions, the universities felt that they had to seek a directive from the Ministry of Higher Education before they admitted a qualified non-Zimbabwean applicant. (This was not isolationism; the universities were active in links with other institutions, but did not wish to be involved in hosting students from abroad.) Occasionally, of course, there are times when a country's political situation is fragile and it is not in a position to make foreign students welcome.

All the same, there is general support for more member countries to act as hosts to students from other Commonwealth countries, and there are moves for host countries and institutions to share experiences, problems and successes. The first meeting of host countries was held in London in July 2001. There are also several activities within the Commonwealth favouring South–South exchange. The existence in two regions of universities serving a number of countries encourages a mix of nationalities on campus; these are the University of the West Indies and the University of the South Pacific. There has also been a recent move among Commonwealth African universities each to offer at least one place for a student from another African university each year.

Another challenge is the participation of women in the plan. Fewer women than men gain access to the awards. There are reasons why fewer women come forward, to do with uneven gender access in their home countries, but there has been concern that more women should benefit from the CSFP since the Colombo conference of 1980.

With regard to scholarships, there has been a fairly steady upward trend towards a more even gender balance among award-holders and the participating countries may begin to feel that the challenge is being met, on the evidence of Figure 1.

With regard to scholarships, there has been a fairly steady upward trend towards a more even gender balance among award-holders. For the first ten years of the scheme, the proportion of women to men among them hovered between one to nine and one to seven (10–11%). The percentage of women then moved upwards to between 15% and 20% at the start of the 1990s. There followed a rapid increase in the number of women scholarship winners, so that by 1999 women made up 40% of the total. Women holding UK scholarships made up 46% of the whole cohort by the year 2001. Participating countries may therefore feel that the challenge of gender balance is being met.

The position with fellowships is less satisfactory. The average for the last decade was 22% women among fellowship holders. Clearly this remains a challenge.

There have also been requests that awards might be held at a wider range of institutions. In the early years, students applied to a small number of well-known universities in the host countries and it was felt that they should be encouraged to go to some of the less well-known (but good quality) ones as well. Further, there were requests that award-holders might go outside the university sector – to

colleges of adult education (New Delhi, 1962) and to technical and professional institutions (Nicosia, 1984).

Administering such a wide-ranging programme carries burdens of miscommunication or misunderstanding which may have fundamental consequences. Some donor countries become frustrated when their scholarships and fellowships are not openly advertised in potential sending countries and suspect that the best candidates are not always put forward. This may be because bureaucrats in those countries do not understand the principles of genuinely open competition, or because communications in their countries are poor and open advertisement therefore difficult and costly, or because those bureaucrats and their political bosses see all such awards as a form of patronage. Some amelioration of this problem should come with the development of a CSFP website. When advertisements and applications are on-line, the bureaucrats and politicians may have their monopoly of information subverted.

All these points relate to improving and modifying the existing programme. There are two further issues, stemming from the South–North nature of student flows within the Plan, which pose deeper challenges. One is the challenge of alienation, of students from the South being offered in the North curricula which are not relevant to their own societies. This was strongly expressed at the conference in Kingston in 1974 and has been mentioned in Commonwealth conferences and other fora on very many occasions. One eloquent encapsulation of the curriculum problem was by Guy Hunter in a contribution to a study on British policy by the Overseas Student Trust in 1981:

> *The accusation that this was not the moment to adopt the full Western academic style sticks rather more deeply. Secondly, it is on the technical side that perhaps the most telling and still valid criticism might be raised. Have we not taught industrial technologies from the West, technologies which are labour-saving and capital-intensive in form, wholly unsuited to the factor proportion and wage-levels of a quite different economic stage ? In health services have we not concentrated on fully trained doctors when what was needed above all was preventive medicine and simple services for the 70–90% rural population at village level?*

The Lagos conference in 1968 expressed the worry that Commonwealth scholars returning home might not find suitable jobs; perhaps they were not all educated suitably for the jobs available?

Full information on subjects studied by all award-holders would repay further research, but the latest CSFP report gives a picture of subject choices in the 1990s. Arts students are heavily concentrated in award-winners from countries of the 'Old Commonwealth', while there is a more even spread of subjects taken up by students from the 'New Commonwealth', i.e. the countries of low and medium human development. The nominating countries in the South have always been interested in their award-winners undertaking studies of development relevance (the subject

of universities and development was already in the forefront as early as the Canberra conference of 1971); and there have been suggestions that there may be a conflict between development-related subject matter and the plan's principle of promoting 'the highest levels of intellectual achievement', since some of the highest intellectual achievers may be specialists in subjects not seen as immediately pertinent to development needs. More direct development training is funded through the CFTC, while the plan's distinctiveness lies in its encouragement of academic excellence. Without more substantial data on subjects of study and performance of CSFP award-winners it is hard to assess whether the alleged tension between relevance and intellectual distinction has been of any significance in the evolution of the plan. Anecdotal evidence does not lend credence to the allegation, although it suggests a slight shift in subjects of study from humanities to business and technology. This is a general phenomenon. The CEC/UKCOSA study in 2000 showed upturns in demand among all international students in the UK for medicine and allied fields, engineering and technology, computing science, and business and administrative studies. There was only a small upturn in agriculture, which should be highly relevant to development, but a significant increase in the number of students opting for creative arts and design – which some people might question, although others would argue that cultural studies are crucial to national development because of such diverse concerns as national identity and reliance on tourism.

Connected with alienation and the study of subjects with currency in the North (which, of course, include computing and business) is the second issue arising from South–North student flows. This is the challenge, of 'brain drain', always alluded to when international study is under scrutiny. It was foreseen as a possible problem at the outset of the plan and occasionally raised in Commonwealth meetings. There were references to 'alleged' non-return of scholars, but the scale of non-return is not known. There is however, some evidence from two tracer studies carried out to follow up the careers of former award-holders. One was done on behalf of the Commonwealth by Dr Alastair Niven and published by the Secretariat in January 1989. The other was carried out by the United Kingdom Commonwealth Scholarship Commission in 2000 and its initial findings are available. Neither study can be taken as definitive, because of the small number of respondents in each case, but they do at least provide pointers. The 1989 study showed that between 85% and 93% of award-holders from developing countries returned home immediately. The award-holders from Australia and New Zealand were the significant non-returners (42% and 43% respectively) at the end of their award period, but a further 20% and 21% of the respondents from those countries went back within five years.

The recent British research had very similar findings. Ninety-two per cent of all respondents had returned to their own countries. The main nationalities of those who relocated were Australian, Canadian and New Zealand. Some of those who reported not being in their own country were either representing their country in

some forum or serving with Commonwealth or other international bodies, such as COL, WHO or the World Bank. Although the evidence is not conclusive, it is indicative and encouraging. Nevertheless, in an era of globalisation it is likely that at least some former award-holders will be found working outside their home nation. In some cases, this can be taken as positive if they are working for the Commonwealth or the UN and also if those from the South are working in other countries in the South. For instance, there is evidence that there is more interchange of qualified academics and professionals within anglophone Africa at the present time and some of these may well be former award-holders.

All these problems relate to the CSFP as such. One further point is worth reflecting on. Prestige is attached to the awards, and beneficiaries have built valuable careers on them, but most of them go through their programmes with little knowledge of the meaning of the Commonwealth and little opportunity to find out about it. Given that the plan is premised on a common value system, it would seem rather important that those who, through the plan, are likely to attain positions of influence in member countries, should carry forward those values and an understanding of the Commonwealth as an institution.

c. Achievements and Impact of the Plan

The challenges posed to the CSFP should not derogate from its achievements. It was, and is, a remarkable programme based on a clear vision and well implemented – a deft combination of a multilateral scheme with a series of bilateral agreements. The numbers of beneficiaries from the scheme are large. Approximately 3000 people have taken up fellowships during the past 40 years (although at the present time the UK is the only country offering fellowships). Table 2 gives the number of scholarships.

This means that by the year 2000, over 21,000 people had participated in the CSFP. Sixty Commonwealth countries and dependent territories had sent students and academics. About 10% of students were undergraduates, while the rest were postgraduate. Both the tracer studies mentioned (1989 and 2000) picture most participants as beneficiaries. The quality of the student experience was in general appreciated – only about 1% of respondents had reservations, mostly about the applicability of their learning in their own environment (as discussed above). A member government's reaction was given by Wenike Briggs, the Nigerian Federal Commissioner for Education, at the Conference in Lagos in 1968. He said that the CSFP:

> *... has benefited our scholars immeasurably, not only because of the opportunity it has given them academically in the fields of Engineering, Technology and Medicine, but also because it has made most of them aware that knowledge is an international commodity of exchange. On their return, we have found them enriched in knowledge and experience, eager to keep the contacts they had made abroad and more self-critical and mature in their work at home.*

Table 2. Scholarships Taken up Annually under CSFP

Year	No. of scholarships	Year	No. of scholarships	Year	No. of scholarships	Year	No. of scholarships
1960/61	335	1970/71	387	1980/81	325	1990/91	502
1961/62	428	1971/72	401	1981/82	467	1991/92	620
1962/63	358	1972/73	389	1982/83	467	1992/93	614
1963/64	390	1973/74	442	1983/84	537	1993/94	608
1964/65	413	1974/75	466	1984/85	492	1994/95	618
1965/66	381	1975/76	375	1985/86	669	1995/96	608
1966/67	439	1976/77	374	1986/87	576	1996/97	488
1967/68	371	1977/78	417	1987/88	478	1997/98	400
1968/69	407	1978/79	420	1988/89	561	1998/99	412
1969/70	407	1979/80	327	1989/90	435	1999/2000	451
10-year total:	3,929	10-year total	3,998	10-year total:	5,007	10-year total:	5,321
		20-year total:	7,927	30-year total:	12,934	40-year total:	18,255

The alumni of the programme have, over the years, made their mark in a very wide variety of professions. A substantial number (the largest cluster) have become senior academics and researchers, including in their ranks directors of research institutions and several well-known vice-chancellors. This is partly the result of deliberate policy by host governments; Britain, for example, reserves 40% of its Commonwealth awards budget for Fellowships and staff development scholarships. The 2000 tracer study reports on former award-holders who have become political leaders (parliamentary Speakers and at least one Prime Minister), high court judges, senior civil servants, top bankers, journalists and publishers, the municipal engineer of one of the world's largest cities, as well as managing directors of companies. The record is impressive and it is a pity that it is only in the last dozen years that efforts have been made to define it.

There have been many voices suggesting an alumni association for Commonwealth scholars and fellows, which would, among other things, provide much more information on what does become of the award-bearers. A beginning has been made with an association of those who held British awards. Since Britain has been the largest provider, this could theoretically comprise up to 12,000 men and women (but of course not all will still be alive). The association was launched in Ghana on 19 April 2000 and is supported by a newsletter, *Omnes* (meaning 'everybody') which will include a regular feature: Where Are They Now ?

The plan has kept an aura of prestige and there is testimony that to be a Commonwealth scholar or fellow was regarded as a privilege. Through all the various reviews, the education conferences have agreed that continuing the programme is worthwhile. There was a period in the late 1980s when there was some feeling that the CSFP had become static, but since then the burgeoning of student mobility around the world has reinforced the importance of any programme which encourages mobility within the Commonwealth. There has been a renewed realisa-

tion of the vital contribution of higher education to development, spurred by the work of a recent World Bank task force on higher education and society. There have also been suggestions for some changes in the CSFP which seem likely to be put into effect – the possibility of awards for distance learning such as COL has already experimented with – see Chapter 6 – and for fellowships for senior people in the professions and business, for instance. Such modifications could be made quite easily if Commonwealth ministers of education and member countries providing awards wish it. One of the great strengths of the CSFP remains its flexibility.

The plan's other strengths include its insistence on high quality and its mode of operation. It is also virtually unique in consciously favouring countries of medium and low human development. The United Kingdom consistently targets 50% of its awards to African countries and another 30% to the Indian subcontinent, and of the 1125 scholarship holders on courses in 1996/97, 348 were from sub-Saharan Africa, 363 from south Asia and 110 from the Caribbean (these are typical proportions year on year).

6 Bone of Contention – the Work of the Standing Committee on Student Mobility

a. Brief History

Because there had been such a strong consensus on the value of the student mobility, there was an intensity to the reaction among developing countries in the Commonwealth when the main host countries raised the level of fees chargeable to students from abroad. Britain raised fees progressively from 1966, but in Commonwealth policy discussions the first mention of higher fees was made at Colombo in 1980. At that point, differential fees in the UK had become 'full-cost' fees and international higher education was beginning to be seen as an invisible export like insurance or financial services. 'Full cost' is, of course, a difficult concept. On the one hand, in market terms such fees relate to what the traffic will bear, with high-demand subjects costing more than less sought-after ones and with the most highly-reputed universities charging more than the less well-known ones. The fee data for UK universities given in Table 3 illustrates this for the academic year 2001/2002.

Clearly, laboratory subjects carry more costs than 'classroom' subjects, but the huge range of charges for, say, the MBA, must be about reputation as well as actual costs. The other side of the argument is that international students were being taught at the margin in some cases, while in others their presence was sustaining whole departments and research programmes and thus subsidising students from the home country.

In any case, the imposition of 'full-cost' fees was an immediate source of anger and bitterness in the Commonwealth. The eighth Commonwealth Education Conference Report stated:

> *In recent years several countries have increased the fees they charge for overseas students, causing a great deal of hardship to students from Commonwealth countries and affecting significantly the manpower needs of those countries which do not have adequate educational facilities of their own. Many of these countries sponsor their students in other Commonwealth countries at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels. Another effect of the increases will be to affect the traditional mobility of students which in the past has helped to maintain Commonwealth links and benefit not only the developing countries but developed countries as well.*
>
> Eighth Commonwealth Education Conference Report, para. 46

The conference recommended that governments for fee purposes treat as home students those receiving Commonwealth awards, national awards and recognised international agency awards, as well as an agreed number of students from developing countries in the Commonwealth which did not have adequate educational facilities of their own. This recommendation was not acted upon, but India then, and for many years after, kept fees down for all international students. Some Canadian provinces also kept fees at home levels for the international students they received. It was proposed at the Colombo conference that a 'consultative group' should be set up to look into the problem. This group, chaired by Sir Hugh Springer, at the time Secretary-General of the ACU, was the first official Commonwealth entity to tackle the subject of high fees levied on non-nationals by major host countries. The climate of opinion at the time was still one of incredulity over the charges; there was still a belief that negotiation would persuade the host nations to modify their position. In introducing their recommendations on tuition fees for

Table 3. Tuition Fees for International Students, UK Universities 2001/2002 (£ sterling)

	Median Fee	Range 5th Percentile	95th Percentile
Undergraduate:			
Classroom	6,900	5,867	8,868
Laboratory	8,375	6,353	10,608
Clinical	17,700	16,804	20,450
Taught Postgraduate:			
Classroom	7,100	6,000	8,700
Laboratory	8,755	6,498	10,333
Clinical	17,534	11,259	20,450
MBA	9,000	6,888	18,350
Research Postgraduate:			
Classroom	7,083	6,000	8,249
Laboratory	8,775	6,500	9,995
Clinical	17,660	11,334	20,450

Source: Universities UK

international students, Sir Hugh's team said: 'Until such time as fees are again fixed at considerably less than full cost, we recommend ... '. This was not much more than 20 years ago, but at that stage no one fully appreciated the trend towards the commodification of higher education and the economic value to governments and academic institutions which international students represented (only a decade and a half later it was calculated that total international fee income to British universities amounted to over £700 million sterling).

The group's interest was to safeguard in the meanwhile the CSFP and similar student exchange schemes, since the fee rises hit hard at their budgets. Their recommendations (more in the nature of a plea) to member governments included (following the Colombo line) their consideration of fee exemption or support to students on approved exchange schemes or who had obtained recognised merit awards. To palliate the impact of high fees on Commonwealth student mobility, they recommended additional CSFP awards at postgraduate level, as well as short-stay and split-level programmes. They advocated a broader framework for a Commonwealth Higher Education Programme. Their thoughts on fees were bequeathed to a new body recommended by them, a standing committee of members serving in a personal capacity, with a pan-Commonwealth remit and answerable to Commonwealth education ministers.

The Standing Committee was set up and had its first meeting in July 1982, under the Chairmanship of Sir Roy Marshall, Vice-Chancellor of the University of Hull, UK and a member of the Council of the ACU; he had earlier been, among other things, Vice-Chancellor of the University of the West Indies and then Secretary-General of the British Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Principals and so brought a breadth of appropriate experience to the task. Not even he, with all his insight, could have foreseen that it was to be a task like that of Sisyphus, trying to push a boulder up-hill – against the gradient of the new Thatcherite mood in the richer countries of the Commonwealth.

The Standing Committee met annually until 1986 and then might seem to have been running out of steam (although it sponsored or commissioned various other activities in between subsequent meetings), as it only met twice afterwards, in 1989 and 1992. This was largely because there was not enough money to pay for it. It was finally put to sleep by the CCEM in Islamabad in 1994. Throughout, the Committee's main focus was on student mobility but its constructive interest from the beginning in ancillary higher education initiatives led to its title and remit being formally widened by CHOGM in 1987 – on the recommendation of the Nairobi CEC held earlier in the same year. Its title then became: Standing Committee on Student Mobility *and Higher Education Co-operation.* While its general preoccupation was still with interchange of students and scholars, its interests widened to include mobility of knowledge through distance learning and a range of means for intra-Commonwealth mutual support in higher education. Its main success was in the latter areas. A list of the Committee's reports on its meetings is given in Appendix 4.

b. The Committee in Action

In his foreword to the fifth report of the Standing Committee in 1986, the Commonwealth Secretary-General gave a useful review of what the committee had done up to that point. He said that the Commonwealth had reason to be grateful to the committee.

> *This is not just their illuminating analyses, helping us to understand the direction of the movement of students within the Commonwealth; though they have certainly produced those. But they have also challenged governments to re-examine and in some cases to modify, their policies; and they have sensitised member countries to the effect their policies may have on others within the Commonwealth. The realisation is growing – but all too slowly – that in this area a concerted approach is desirable.*

Information-gathering and analysis were important features of the committee's activity. Members made effective use of work done by other agencies; for instance, at the beginning, they were helped by data made available from the Overseas Student Trust, especially its publication, *A Policy for Overseas Students* (Williams, 1982).

Almost immediately, the committee commissioned its own data, with the energetic and dedicated help of Secretariat officials. Over the years, the committee was instrumental in producing case studies of student mobility as it affected India, Kenya, Nigeria (all 1986), Britain, Malaysia (both 1990) and Australia (1991); major policy-related studies on centres of excellence by Ian Maxwell (1983) and on international development programmes in higher education by Carol Coombe (1989); and three books – *Staff Development in Commonwealth Higher Education* (ACU, 1992), *Student Mobility from Britain to Commonwealth Developing Countries* (Callan and Steel, 1992) and *Towards a Commonwealth of Scholars* (Bown, 1994). A good deal of statistical material on Commonwealth student flows was collected, over a long enough time-scale to make trends discoverable and a model was devised to continue monitoring these flows (Tillman, 1988). Regrettably, after 1994 there was no continuation in the Commonwealth of a monitoring exercise; and this was one reason for the recent joint report by the Council for Education in the Commonwealth and UKCOSA, accompanied by detailed analyses done by Kees Maxey.

The statistics collected in the1980s showed a levelling-off of international student numbers in the Commonwealth attributed to the raising of fees by Britain, followed by other countries, or what the Committee's second report called 'the new protectionism'. From the beginning, the Standing Committee fully acknowledged that nearly all policy decisions on student mobility and on fees and awards were domestic decisions, matters for individual member governments, but efforts were continually made to make governments aware of some of the implications of their policies so that they might act both individually and collectively. Addressing individual governments, the second report said stoutly: 'it needs to be acknowledged that no country however large or sophisticated can hope to be self-sufficient in the

provision of educational opportunities'. The value of co-operation both for educational purposes and for Commonwealth cohesion was stressed at every meeting – although by the second meeting the committee was already grappling with the problem of political will and commitment 'within our association' (meaning the Commonwealth). In the early 1980s it seemed that will and commitment might be shaping up, and at its fourth meeting the committee was encouraged by the 'overwhelming endorsement' of the committee's recommendations on, for example, national student exchange policies by 9CCEM at Nicosia in 1984. It was noted, though, that while the world trend in international mobility was upwards, within the Commonwealth it was at a plateau.

The levying by major host countries of the same fees on Commonwealth students as on other students continued to be a sore point until the end of the committee's life. At the same time, it sought other ways of reducing the financial burden of intra-Commonwealth higher education. The commissioned study of 1990 on Malaysia featured a number of alternative expedients, such as split-site degree programmes and off-shore campuses (much favoured by Australia).

By 1989, however, the committee painted a depressing picture of a decade in which intra-Commonwealth student exchange had dropped by 13%, which members saw as 'seriously disturbing'. They were looking by then at creative alternatives and palliatives to fee reduction, but made one more effort to crack the problem. At the seventh meeting, the Committee's most prominent agenda item was a consultation with member governments. Representatives of 32 member countries gathered to discuss a more favourable fee regime for Commonwealth students in the elegant surroundings of Lancaster House in London. Neither Australia nor New Zealand were present and the British and Canadian representatives signalled that there was no change in their governments' positions. Proposals for change:

> *were supported by the great majority of participants and there was acute disappointment that the industrialised host countries were neither able to change their position in any respect – nor to advance alternative proposals. The convening of the meeting appeared to most of those present to have served no useful purpose.*

Not surprisingly, the Committee's report was titled *The Final Frustration* and the Committee itself was dissolved by the 1994 CCEM held in Islamabad.

The Standing Committee's success was not, however, limited to data gathering and analysis. Alongside the fee discussions there was firm adherence to wider issues of co-operation and particularly of institution-building; several of the most creative Commonwealth initiatives in higher education in the 1990s sprang from the Standing Committee's work.

c. New Approaches to Higher Education Co-operation in the 1990s: The Standing Committee as Originator

The committee's wider interests in higher education co-operation led it down new paths. Already, at its fourth meeting, it reported that in spite of the centrality of student mobility, this was only one element in higher education co-operation. Its later reports produced creative suggestions on: *open learning*; *capacity-building*; and *alternative forms of exchange*. First, open learning or the transmission of knowledge to people, rather than bringing people to knowledge sources, is a useful way of reducing the fee problem as well as of widening access. As communications technology improves, it becomes ever more attractive. The Standing Committee saw all this and at its fifth meeting made recommendations for the Commonwealth to develop open learning. Its urgings were a strong influence on the Secretary-General's decision to commission the Briggs Report and set up a working group to develop the Commonwealth of Learning. The history and work of COL are examined in Chapter 6. Here we should note the continuing link between the Standing Committee and COL, since three committee members were also on the COL Board and Sir Roy Marshall, the Standing Committee's Chairperson, gave various services to the Board. The vision of borderless learning continues to be an attractive one and was endorsed at the Halifax CCEM in 2000.

Secondly, schemes of capacity building evolved from the Committee's conviction that:

> *... if developing countries are to sustain and improve the quality of higher education and to keep abreast of new developments in science and technology, their universities require additional physical and financial resources and access to international research and information networks.*
>
> Sixth Report

At an early stage, the setting up was mooted of a Fund for Higher Education Co-operation along the lines of the CFTC. Reading it now, it seems rather utopian and the idea was scaled down to a plan for a Commonwealth Higher Education Support System (CHESS). This was the main recommendation of the Standing Committee's sixth meeting in 1989.

CHESS was to consist of three components: a programme of books, materials and library support; a higher education management programme; and a staff development programme. All of these involve some mobility of persons. The management programme evolved into CHEMS (Commonwealth Higher Education Management Service), which aimed in its mission statement 'to be ultimately recognised as the leading Commonwealth provider of specialist management consultancy help and information to higher education', and developed a register of over 90 consultants. It had five years initial funding from CFTC. CHEMS as an entity was formally wound up in January 2001, but its activities continued through

the Policy and Research Unit of the Association of Commonwealth Universities and through a private sector agency known as CHEMS Consulting.

The third achievement of the Committee was to promote the institutional development of *an alternative form of student exchange*: the Commonwealth Universities Study Abroad Consortium. On several occasions, Standing Committee members considered the possibility of student exchange on a direct bilateral basis, between institutions, so that no fees are paid on either side. The idea was fleshed out at the 1992 Singapore workshop commissioned by the Standing Committee and reported finally in the book, *Towards A Commonwealth of Scholars*. The Standing Committee, at what proved to be its final meeting, pressed the idea of fee-free exchanges for institution-building and also to provide more opportunities between developing countries. It recommended that a scheme should be organised through a consortium of individual institutions.

CUSAC was planned at a meeting in Delhi in 1993 and formally inaugurated in the same year. Originally, it had 28 subscribing members. At the end of 2000, there were 74. The main transactions are the movement of undergraduates for six months or a year to study abroad for a credit towards their home university programme. The administrative costs are met partly from the subscriptions, at present £300 per institution, and partly from a grant by the CFTC. In the 1990s, there was an average of about 90 exchanges a year, though the numbers were of course lower at the beginning of the decade and higher at the end.

At first, it looked as though there would be more North–North exchanges than South–South and South–North ones, because no exchange is absolutely costless and poorer institutions found it hard to pay fares. At the end of the decade, the ACU made a grant of £300,000 sterling to provide bursaries covering air fares and part-maintenance. The pilot scheme for bursaries in 2000 was reported as successful, with 31 awards offered, involving 17 member institutions. A new round of bursaries was being advertised at the time of writing. While numbers are still small, the establishment of the consortium gives an alternative framework for exchange and students are travelling additional to those covered by CSFP. They are also probably a different category of student – undergraduates in mid-degree, travelling for only a short period. The quality of their experience can be judged from some of the testimonies in the newsletter, *CUSAC Update*. A student from the University of Cape Coast in Ghana who went to Sokoine University in Tanzania says: '... seeing tourist regions like Arusha and Kilimanjaro was a great experience to me. In addition to that my perception has changed towards other people's views and cultures', and a student from the University of the South Pacific who went to the University of the West Indies echoes this: '[It] has opened me up to a new perception of the world'. There is no information at present on the gender balance among beneficiaries from the scheme as a whole. One third of the bursary holders in 2000 were women and two-thirds men.

The work of CUSAC was recognised by ministers at 14CCEM in Halifax.

7 The Shape of the Future

Student mobility has become steadily more important over the 40 years of Commonwealth educational activity. The growth of initiatives such as the CSFP, COL and CUSAC are to the credit of successive CECs/CCEMs – they have all been pioneering and creative. Individual countries have also made valuable contributions. The steadfast way in which India kept international fees low until quite recently has already been recognised. There has been a useful United Kingdom initiative in the Shared Scholarship Scheme (SSS), through which 200 awards a year are made and are available to Commonwealth countries only.

At the same time complacency is not in order. The story of the Standing Committee points up the deep gulf which exists between members from the South and North over access and funding and these issues, which are about politics and economics, not scholarship, remain unresolved. The basic Commonwealth values are about equality and equity and yet there is a severe imbalance in which some nations largely finance schemes of people and knowledge interchange, while there are now massive financial barriers inhibiting the access of students from the poorer Commonwealth countries to any form of international education. Much of the market in international higher education is dependent on private finance – hence the preponderance of some of the richer Commonwealth countries of south-east Asia in Commonwealth student flows. The access to international higher education, even to international knowledge through borderless learning, by poorer students from poorer countries is heavily contingent on public provision of awards. The role of the CSFP will continue to be essential for those students without private finance (or well-heeled governments) and the expansion of the programme into distance learning scholarships is a recent welcome development. Without the CSFP, COL and other schemes (such as those funded by the CFTC), the imbalance in student access between rich and poor, high and low human development would be even more marked and the 6% of students from countries of low human development would be obliterated.

Meanwhile the imbalances will continue to be a sore point in the Commonwealth. The result of recent struggles over fees has been a certain loss of camaraderie and mutual trust among member nations; but the latest CCEM in Halifax showed that there is still enough confidence to make a success of some of the alternative initiatives which have been developed.

It remains true that all members have something to learn from others and all have something to give. It is a principle of importance in an era of ever wider and faster communications. Now more than ever before it is also true that:

> *information is the only resource we have that is non-depletable and can be freely shared without depriving anyone of its use.*