

## ADMINISTRATION OF THE COMMONWEALTH SCHOLARSHIP AND FELLOWSHIP PLAN

The Annual Report of the Commonwealth Scholarship and Fellowship Plan provides individual countries with the opportunity to comment on the working of the Plan, and this year all but twelve have done so. This compares favourably with last year's "shortfall" of 21, but it is nevertheless a matter for concern that some countries benefiting from the Plan have failed to contribute. Commonwealth Scholarships, the first and still by far the most numerous offspring of the Plan, have provided the main topic for discussion and even though for some years the Plan has been enlarged to embrace other types of award only four agencies have mentioned specifically these other awards.

In the 1979-80 Report on the Plan the hope was expressed that additional countries would offer awards, and it was a pleasure to read Sierra Leone's announcement that she would be making two Scholarships available for competition.

Many agencies expressed satisfaction with the Plan but some questioned its basic aim which, primarily, is to enable students of high intellectual promise to pursue postgraduate studies at university. It was the firm opinion of a number of agencies that the Plan should enable students to acquire professional and technical qualifications and that there should be more scope in it for undergraduate awards. Medicine, veterinary science and pharmacy were among the fields of study for which undergraduate scholarships were requested.

### Editorial notes:

*(i) A few agencies appeared to be unaware that the Plan already allowed for the possibility of undergraduate studies in certain circumstances; their attention is drawn to the contributions of Britain, Cyprus, India, Malta, and New Zealand.*

*(ii) Agencies wishing the basic aims of the Plan to be reconsidered will no doubt have made their views known when replying to the questionnaire relating to the Ten Year Review of the Working of the Plan, called for by the Eighth Commonwealth Education Conference in Colombo.*

Useful suggestions were made for improving competition arrangements. There was an appeal from one awarding country for better publicity for its awards and from others for more prompt submission of nominations. There were still a few agencies which sent their papers very late. Such delay not only gave the awarding agencies administrative problems but even more seriously could ultimately be detrimental to the interests of very good candidates. On the other hand, one nominating agency suggested that awarding countries themselves might help matters by giving sufficient notice of their intention to invite nominations. At least five months, it was pointed out, was recommended in "conference reports".

There was evidence that awards under the Plan were generally popular. New Zealand, for example, described her applications as "the cream of the students who have just completed honours degrees". Several agencies demonstrated the degree of care that was taken to nominate the best candidate available, and in many places it was apparent that the relevance of a candidate's proposed studies to national priorities was an important factor in selection. One agency which reported a poor response to advertisements to apply for Commonwealth Scholarships thought that its Government's bonding agreements might be deterring candidates.

A few agencies expressed disappointment at their candidates' lack of success in the competition for awards, and one asked for the reasons for rejection to be given so that its selection committee might bear them in mind in future. Botswana feared that its candidates might suffer in competition with certain candidates from the developed Commonwealth.

Editorial note:

*In Britain, to offer one example, there is no competition between candidates from the developing and developed countries, as there is a separate financial allocation for each of the two groups of countries.*

Uncertainty about funding at the time of selection had made for caution in offering awards in Britain and New Zealand, so that unfortunately a lower number of awards than usual was given by these countries. Both countries' agencies however were hopeful that the decline in numbers would only be a temporary one and that a full programme of awards could be restored in 1981-82.

Opinion on the ideal length of Commonwealth Scholarships varied. Some agencies advocated more flexibility so that an award covered the whole period of study required, but there was some support for a three year limit. One agency suggested that without such a limit scholars might "stay on and on". Fiji suggested that postgraduate medical clinical awards might extend to five years, and agencies advocating awards for undergraduate studies in medicine and veterinary science no doubt hoped for awards of similar tenure. Australia in her role as an awarding country, reported a trend towards longer awards, resulting in an average length of well over three years each.

Award holders under the Plan have always been required to sign an undertaking to return to their own countries, and a noticeable number of agencies were satisfied that most of their scholars had honoured the undertaking. There were tributes to award holders and to their ability which had been enhanced by their studies abroad. In the Gambia it was gratifying to read that "quite a number of top-level and middle-level management in the public and private sector were people who benefited from the Commonwealth Scholarship and Fellowship Plan", and from other reports it was evident that the Plan, albeit indirectly, had been of real value to many countries.

The compilers of this report acknowledge with gratitude the efforts of all agencies concerned in providing them with the statements in the Summary which follows and with all the facts and figures in the Appendices.