

Higher education: what role can the Commonwealth play?

Background paper for discussion at the 19th Conference of Commonwealth Education Ministers

Introduction

Higher education is increasingly recognised as being critical to social and economic prosperity. It is also a policy area where the Commonwealth could significantly increase its impact. This could be achieved without major cost, by working through activities already in place, and persuading member governments to make stronger use of these brands and mechanisms.

We make this argument for six reasons:

- Higher education is *important* – and until recently has been undervalued in international development debates.
- Higher education is already an *international commodity* – thus well suited to international initiatives.
- Initiatives in higher education can create real *mutual interest* between developing and developed countries.
- Higher education is undergoing *rapid change* – and the need for advice and objective sources of information is greater than ever.
- The Commonwealth already has *longstanding and well-recognised brands* in higher education on which to build.
- The Commonwealth can draw on a range of *existing agencies* to pursue higher education initiatives.

This paper does not provide a comprehensive overview of higher education policy. It focuses on four key areas selected by the 19CCEM Steering Committee. These were chosen because of their importance, relevance to conference themes, and synergy with existing Commonwealth-related initiatives. In each case, the brief summary of issues is intended to stimulate debate on whether, and how, the Commonwealth could play a greater role.

Ahead of the new SDG framework of global development targets, the Association of Commonwealth Universities (ACU) convened **The world beyond 2015 – Is higher education ready?** campaign to explore the role of higher education in delivering social and developmental impact.

“A robust higher education sector (within a wider education strategy) is indispensable for achieving development targets across the forthcoming SDG framework.”¹

Key points emerging from the campaign are:

- Higher education institutions are well-placed to feed **research evidence** into the design of national development policy and strategy.
- Meeting the MDGs and SDGs depends upon paths for **skilled graduates**.
- Harmonisation of education strategy from **primary through to higher education** can ensure sustainable paths for students and can lay the groundwork for accommodating growth in enrolment at all education levels.
- Growing enrolment at primary and secondary levels behoves a comprehensive strategy to ensure **access and quality** at the higher education level.
- **Higher education underpins all development targets**, from poverty reduction to employability, health to environmental sustainability.

¹ ‘The world beyond 2015 – Is higher education ready?’, paper to the 19th Conference of Commonwealth Education Ministers, 22-26 June 2015

Costs and access

Higher education enrolments globally are expected to increase from 100 million in 2000 to 260 million in 2025.² Nearly all of that growth will be in the developing world, where some individual countries show even steeper increases. India, for example, plans to increase enrolment from 18% to 30% in the six years to 2020, a policy which will mean providing an additional 14 million places.³ Across Africa, a system that contained some 200,000 students 40 years ago now serves an estimated 10 million.⁴

The growth has been largely demand-led – through demographic change, rising living standards, and confidence on the part of applicants and their families that higher education will bring personal or economic returns in the future. Clear links exist with increased secondary enrolments, supporting the argument that higher education should be prominent in future international development objectives.

An example of this is Kenya, where the number of secondary school graduates increased by 108% in the decade to 2012.⁵ The proportion of these obtaining the minimum entry requirement for university also increased, from 21.6% to 28.3%. Public universities have increased enrolment by 487% over the same period, and 219% in the three years to 2012 alone. This has increased the proportion of qualified school leavers being offered a place, but still leaves 57% of qualified students (over 70,000 students in 2012) without that opportunity.

“All universities in Australia have been tasked with substantially increasing the provision of places to low socioeconomic status students. Consequently there has been great concentration and investment directed towards engaging students from traditionally underrepresented cohorts, and providing access and pathways into higher education for all potential students. Additionally, to prevent social restriction, it is necessary to fund more scholarships to support students in need.”

Stephanie Bryant, University of Adelaide, Australia⁶

Should governments continue to prioritise overall numbers? Several reports argue that sudden expansion may be at the expense of quality. The Asian Development Bank notes that ‘While higher education systems within the region have expanded rapidly over the past decade or more, funding has failed to parallel these increases’.⁷ A World Bank study in Africa, which takes a longer-term perspective, reveals a similar story, noting that ‘As the number of tertiary students surged, the funds available to educate each student decreased drastically’.⁸ A former Chair of the Association of Commonwealth Universities (ACU) concludes that ‘The vast majority of public universities in Africa have student enrollment far beyond what they were designed to accommodate. Further enrollment without adequately increasing the infrastructure and other resources can only worsen the situation and affect quality’.⁹

The ACU has argued that expansion is critical, but needs to be carefully planned over a sustained period.¹⁰ Mohamedbhai urges governments to adopt radical approaches, rather than duplicating institutions that already exist. He advocates ‘differentiated’ systems in which higher education institutions (HEIs) have clearly defined, but separate objectives.¹¹ For example, not all universities would claim research expertise, and those which did might be subject to lower growth in student numbers. A related point is made by leading

² See Bob Goddard, *Making A Difference: Australian International Education*, ed. by Dorothy David and Bruce Mackintosh (UNSW Press, 2012), and others

³ Lynne Heslop, *Understanding India: The Future of Higher Education and Opportunities for International Cooperation* (British Council, 2014), p.4 <<http://www.britishcouncil.org/education/ihe/knowledge-centre/national-policies/report-understanding-india>>

⁴ Fred Hayward and Daniel Ncayiyana, ‘Confronting the Challenges of Graduate Education in Sub-Saharan Africa and Prospects for the Future’, *Chronicle of African Higher Education* (2014), p.1 <https://htmlprod.bc.edu/prd/f?p=2290:4:0::NO:RP,4:P0_CONTENT_ID:120996>

⁵ Samuel Waweru, ‘The Role of Private Universities in Meeting Demand for Higher Education in Kenya’, *International Journal of Education and Research*, 1.12 (2013), p.5 <<http://www.ijern.com/journal/December-2013/39.pdf>>

⁶ Stephanie Bryant, ‘Challenges facing higher education institutions’, *The world beyond 2015 – Is higher education ready?* (17 October 2013) <<https://beyond2015.acu.ac.uk/submissions/view?id=106>>

⁷ Asian Development Bank, *Counting the Cost: Financing Asian Higher Education for Inclusive Growth* (Asian Development Bank, 2012), p. vii <<http://www.adb.org/publications/counting-cost-financing-asian-higher-education-inclusive-growth>>

⁸ World Bank, *Accelerating Catch-Up: Tertiary Education for Growth in Sub-Saharan Africa – Synopsis* (World Bank, 2008) <http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTAFRICA/Resources/Synopsis_EN_FINAL.pdf>

⁹ Goolam Mohamedbhai, ‘Higher Education in Africa: Facing the Challenges in the 21st Century’, *International Higher Education*, 63 (2011), p. 20 <<http://ahero.uwc.ac.za/index.php?module=csh&action=downloadfile&fileid=18409092513179282129760>>

¹⁰ John Kirkland, ‘A pyramid without a roof?’, *The ACU Voice* (18 March 2015) <<https://www.acu.ac.uk/about-us/blog/a-pyramid-without-a-roof>>

¹¹ Mohamedbhai, p.20

research universities such as the University of Cape Town, whose Vice-Chancellor told the African Higher Education Summit in March 2015 that, where the two are in conflict, his institution would prioritise research and teaching quality over expansion.

Growth is often justified on the grounds of equity, but the relationship between the two is not automatic. The Asian Development Bank report cited above notes that ‘The costs of higher education are outstripping the capacity of such students to pay, raising acute questions about the need to strengthen social protection measures to make higher education more inclusive’.¹² Meanwhile the proportion of students having to contribute meaningful amounts to the cost of their higher education is increasing – by seven percentage points across OECD countries in the first decade of this century, and probably more steeply still in developing countries.¹³ Any reduction in the quality of domestic systems as a result of growth will also impair equity, since more prosperous students will have a greater choice of study institutions.

Open and distance learning (ODL) methods are often cited as an accessible and affordable route to increasing graduate supply. The Commonwealth of Learning (CoL) works with governments and institutions throughout the Commonwealth to develop regional, national, and institutional policies, and to enhance the capacity of staff to deliver them. CoL has also supported the deployment of low-cost quality assurance systems at institutional level, and the development of short- and long-term training programmes in several areas. Future proposals, which will be detailed more fully in a separate report to Ministers at 19CCEM, seek to:

- Support governments and HEIs to develop and implement national and institutional ODL policies and systems
- Promote curriculum reform in support of labour market needs
- Provide technical assistance to new open universities and support the transition of conventional institutions to ‘dual mode’
- Facilitate institutional networking and collaboration in the development, adoption, and use of ODL and technology-based models such as MOOCs (Massive Open Online Courses)
- Support the professional development of ODL policymakers and practitioners

Private sector universities are increasingly meeting excess demand. There is no single definition of a ‘private’ institution; ‘non-state’ would be a better term. They are not a homogenous group, embracing charitable and religious foundations and non-profit organisations as well as commercial providers. Numerically, their growth has been impressive. A former Secretary General of the Association of African Universities has predicted that by 2017 the number of private universities in Africa will outstrip public ones.¹⁵

In many regions, private education is already the dominant provider. The private sector accounts for 59% of all tertiary enrolment in India.¹⁶ Global university rankings suggest that state universities remain more prestigious and popular in most Commonwealth countries, but there are numerous exceptions to this. A report published by Universities UK suggests that private sector provision had already reached 30% of total

“Rapid growth in student enrolments may have a negative impact both in terms of the quality of learning programmes and service delivery. With internationalisation a growing trend, proliferated through phenomena such as massive open online courses (MOOCs) and online marketing of programmes at low cost, it will become increasingly important to ensure the integrity, credibility and quality of qualifications through appropriate national and international benchmarks for accreditation and quality assurance.”

Gerard Grobler, University of South Africa¹⁴

¹² Asian Development Bank, p. vii

¹³ Elizabeth Gibney, ‘A different world’, *Times Higher Education* (31 January 2013) <<http://www.timeshighereducation.co.uk/features/a-different-world/2001128.article>>

¹⁴ Gerard Grobler, ‘UNISA on the challenges facing higher education’, *Beyond 2015* (12 December 2013) <<https://beyond2015.acu.ac.uk/submissions/view?id=50>>

¹⁵ Olugbemiro Jegede, quoted by Kudzai Mashininga, ‘Private universities set to overtake public institutions’, *University World News* (04 March 2012) <<http://www.universityworldnews.com/article.php?story=20120302141207184>>

¹⁶ Heslop, p.5

global enrolments by 2010, and argues that in many countries the difference between the two is becoming eroded, as public universities become more innovative and self-supporting.¹⁷

The perception that the private sector can be more flexible and innovative than public sector institutions has led some donors to prioritise the former. In a report for the UK Institute for Public Policy Research, Sir Michael Barber, Chief Education Advisor to the Pearson Group, argues that traditional universities will be forced to radically revise their offer, and that new and private modes of delivery will become more prominent as higher education seeks to meet rapidly expanding demand in an age of increased student choice.¹⁸ A recent Higher Education Task Force convened by the UK Department for International Development drew almost exclusively on non-state institutions for its evidence from developing country universities.

Others have suggested hybrid models through which private expertise can work with the state sector. A senior World Bank Education Manager suggests that 'governments have at their disposal several options for ensuring that education imparted is of an acceptable quality without actually being the main provider of education. Publicly financed but privately provided education is one such option. Private management of public institutions is another'.¹⁹

In these circumstances, public as well as private universities need to demonstrate their distinctive role. Given the level of public investment provided, what do state universities provide that private ones do not? Suggested benefits include the argument that state provision ensures quality, and is more equitable due to lower participation costs. Other arguments cite the bias of many private institutions towards subjects that are relatively cheap to teach yet highly marketable, and argue that public universities are vital in balancing provision. Public institutions are also said to have a disproportionate role in preserving the research and community engagement functions of universities. Ensuring that these arguments remain valid, and are backed up by quantifiable evidence, will be crucial in justifying the case for public investment to taxpayers and donors.

One area for such research might be student perceptions and demand. Barber and colleagues argue that higher education is now a market where student demand is king. In fact, we know painfully little about the nature of the student experience in many education systems. Establishing techniques to survey this across Commonwealth countries could be an important element in any Commonwealth programme for higher education.

¹⁷ John Fielden et al, *The growth of private and for-profit higher education providers in the UK* (Universities UK, 2010) <<http://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/highereducation/Documents/2010/PrivateProviders.pdf>>

¹⁸ Michael Barber, Katelyn Donnelly, and Saad Rizvi, *An avalanche is coming: Higher education and the revolution ahead* (Institute for Public Policy Research, 2013) <<http://www.ippr.org/publications/an-avalanche-is-coming-higher-education-and-the-revolution-ahead>>

¹⁹ Harry Patrinos, 'Innovative Approaches to Low Cost Education ; Examples from around the Globe', *Education for Global Development* (18 March 2013) <<http://blogs.worldbank.org/education/innovative-approaches-to-low-cost-education-examples-from-around-the-globe>>

Links with employment

Increased student demand is fuelled by an expectation that a graduate qualification will improve one's career prospects. If this expectation is not met, the result may be a serious loss of confidence in the value of higher education, and emerging frustrations in society as a whole. This is particularly the case for first generation students who are making sacrifices to attend university – whether through tuition fees or opportunity cost.

Several studies have discussed the relationship between higher education, growth and employment. This is summarised in an African context by Pillay.²¹ A comparative international study for the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills in the UK seeks to quantify the benefits using econometric analysis.²² In Asia, a UNESCO report points to 'The prevalent belief is that investing in higher education will lead to an educated workforce and that, as evidence of an educated workforce becomes known, it will attract international investment that will contribute to the economic development of the nation'.²³

At the level of the individual graduate and company, the relationship is more complex. Evidence suggests that, when the number of graduates expands rapidly, there may be significant time lags before the employment market can absorb them. In the meantime, the nature of the graduate labour market may change, with jobs that had not previously been seen as graduate professions routinely recruiting graduates. These factors tend to decrease the differential between graduate and non-graduate salaries. All of these factors may lead to frustration among graduates.

Evidence from employers suggests that the issue is not just graduate numbers, but also a mismatch of skills and expertise. A report in *The Economist* in 2012, pointing out that South Africa has 800,000 vacancies in the private sector alone, but also 600,000 unemployed graduates, may be one example of this.²⁴ Evidence reported from India suggests a 'definite disconnect between the skills and aptitude of the majority of graduates and the needs of industry' and unemployment rates of 25-36% among recent graduates, and 8% for all graduates in urban areas.²⁵ Effective linking of university education to national manpower planning and labour market needs, such as that adopted in Singapore during key periods of economic growth,²⁶ provides a possible model to address such problems, although difficult to implement in the demand-led, student-centred era of expansion described above.

To help address the shortage of business start-up capital available to young graduate entrepreneurs, Mount Kenya University (MKU) has established a Mentorship, Innovation and Entrepreneurship Fund (MIEF). The fund's mandate is to support youth to develop entrepreneurial ideas to fruition, as well as offering support in the form of grants through the **MKU Enterprise Academy**.

The Enterprise Academy aims to foster a paradigm shift among youth from 'education for a good job' to 'education for empowerment', to transform job seekers to job creators. The pioneer class of nine apprentices completed their three-month residential mentorship programme in May 2014, under the tutelage of both MKU academic mentors and leading Kenyan entrepreneurs who served as professional mentors. Each of the young entrepreneurs also received a seed grant.

Mount Kenya University is alive to the fact that our greatest success will not be measured by the number of graduates that we produce but by how competitive, innovative and successful they become.

Simon Gicharu, Founder of Mount Kenya University and Sponsor and Patron of the MKU Enterprise Academy²⁰

²⁰ Mount Kenya University, 'Enterprise Academy 2014 – Creating an enterprising society' (2014)

²¹ Pundy Pillay, *Higher Education and Economic Development: Literature Review* (Centre for Higher Education Transformation, 2011) <<http://chet.org.za/papers/higher-education-and-economic-development-review-literature>>

²² Dawn Holland et al, *The relationship between graduates and economic growth across countries*, BIS Research Paper No. 110 (Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, 2013) <<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/graduates-and-economic-growth-across-countries>>

²³ UNESCO Institute for Statistics, *Higher Education in Asia: Expanding Out, Expanding Up – The rise of graduate education and university research* (UIS, 2014) <<http://www.uis.unesco.org/Library/Documents/higher-education-asia-graduate-university-research-2014-en.pdf>> p.93

²⁴ 'Still dysfunctional', *The Economist* (21 January 2012) <<http://www.economist.com/node/21543214>>

²⁵ Alya Mishra, 'Growing mismatch between graduate skills, market needs', *University World News* (7 February 2014) <<http://www.universityworldnews.com/article.php?story=20140204171742828>>

²⁶ Michael H Lee and Saravanan Gopinathan, 'Centralized Decentralization of Higher Education in Singapore', *CERC Studies in Comparative Education*, 13 (2004), pp.117-136 <http://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007%2F978-94-007-0956-0_7>

Manpower needs are often clearer where these relate to specific technical knowledge and skills. However, employer criticism often relates more to personal or 'soft' skills, such as the ability to work in teams, analyse information, and think innovatively. Many courses provide experience of real-life work situations, or seek to develop entrepreneurial skills among students. What many of these solutions have in common, however, is a requirement for more intensive teaching methods, involving discussion and individual tuition – areas that could easily be threatened in a period of underfunded growth.

In the UK, the University of Leicester's award-winning employability strategy focuses on all students developing and learning to articulate professional skills through practical experience. This helps graduates develop what the university calls 'the extra dimension', which is critical for their workplace progression and future transitions. Elements include:

- **Going beyond work experience and internships:** developing a range of initiatives with top employers and graduate recruiters to co-author and co-deliver teaching and training in entrepreneurship and leadership.
- **Focusing on dispositions and behaviours as well as skills:** embedding the development of 'soft skills' – such as collaboration, communication, critical and global awareness, integrity, and ethics – in curricula, assessment and feedback, and student volunteering and enterprise.
- **Providing multidisciplinary degrees for multidisciplinary futures:** offering students the opportunity to add a minor focusing on specific skills (for example, entrepreneurship, leadership, business ethics, diversity and equality, social justice) to their major discipline.
- **Equipping students for global professions:** taking advantage of increasing student mobility through study abroad and overseas summer schools, as well as a new Global Studies initiative, to emphasise the importance of intercultural experience and awareness in future professional work.

Universities are addressing this issue in a number of ways. Much could be achieved by sharing good practice and resources among institutions internationally. To this end, the Association of Commonwealth Universities, together with the Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Principals in Ghana, is making relations between university and employers a major feature of their conference for university heads, to be held in July 2016.

In some Commonwealth countries, graduate destination surveys provide detailed evidence of how quickly graduates are absorbed into the labour market, and their experience during the months after graduation. The indicators used are imperfect, focusing, for example, on snapshots of destinations after a specific period, but they can serve to focus universities on the effectiveness of their support to students and employers, and send clear signals regarding market failure. Together with the proposal for more accurate ways of generating student opinions of the system made in the previous section, the introduction of such surveys would provide a vital tool for future policy.

Consistent data on graduate employment might also help manage student expectations of what they can realistically expect from their degrees. This would be a valuable outcome in itself. There is a real danger that unrealistic expectations might lead to disaffection with both universities and wider society. Universities must be accountable for their performance in this area, but within a framework that is realistic.

Securing the next generation of academics

Competition for high-quality academics is a global phenomenon. Generally, funding has not increased to the same extent as student numbers. In his study of 15 African universities, Tetty found that, in most cases, the proportion of academic staff with doctorates was below 40%, and that significant proportions did not have a Master's degree.²⁷ The problem was compounded by the demographic threat of an aging academic labour force, and significantly rising student-staff ratios. In the few cases where it was being countered (an example being the University of Ibadan in Nigeria), this reflected a determined effort by the institution to restrict enrolment increases. The problem is not confined to African countries.

Where systems are starting from a weak base, and encountering huge growth in student and university numbers, the situation is particularly acute. The Kenyan government estimates that over 1,000 new doctorates will be needed each year to service the needs of growth already planned in public universities.²⁸ Malaysia has a target of 75% of university staff holding a doctorate in its leading research universities, and 60% in other public institutions.²⁹ In South Africa, the National Development Plan anticipates an increase in the number of doctorates produced annually from 1,421 in 2010, to 5,000 by 2030.³⁰

Such targets demonstrate the importance which governments attach to the quality of provision. However, there are dangers in pursuing them too aggressively to the exclusion of other policy objectives. Mohamedbhai points out that the creation of new universities with similar profiles to existing ones may simply increase demand for existing qualified staff.³¹ There is also a need to avoid the possibility that pursuit of numbers might influence the standard expected from a doctoral qualification.

Some question the *need* for all academic staff to hold high-level academic qualifications. A key element in the idea of 'unbundling' proposed by Michael Barber and others is that the different packages of skills that comprise higher qualifications can be taught separately, and in ways better tailored to individual needs.³² Similar questions might be asked of institutions which have no aspiration to undertake research. On the other hand, the link between teaching and research is embedded in most university missions, and employers are known to value the 'soft' skills, such as the ability to analyse situations. University education is not just about the acquisition of facts.

A range of policies can be identified to help ease the shortage, including:

- Identification of those areas where supply can be met domestically, and focusing (expensive) overseas supply on those which cannot.
- Expansion of domestic capacity to produce doctorates.
- Stronger partnerships between governments and universities in developed and developing countries to bring down the cost of overseas tuition.
- Further expansion of mechanisms such as split-site or distance learning doctorates, which allow international expertise to be tapped at less cost than conventional international study.
- Measures to encourage a two-way international flow of postdoctoral staff, to help compensate for 'brain drain' from developing to developed countries.

Initiatives in some of these areas are already underway. In their report to Ministers at 19CCEM, the Commonwealth Tertiary Education Facility (CTEF) will outline plans for further work on how to address

²⁷ Wisdom J Tetty, *Challenges of Developing and Retaining the Next Generation of Academics: Deficits in Academic Staff Capacity at African Universities* (Partnership for Higher Education in Africa, 2010) <http://www.foundation-partnership.org/pubs/pdf/tetty_deficits.pdf>

²⁸ Gilbert Nganga, 'PhD to be the compulsory qualification for lecturers', *University World News* (31 October 2014) <<http://www.universityworldnews.com/article.php?story=20141030132504527>>

²⁹ 'Malaysia: Public universities to have more PhDs', *University World News* (31 October 2010) <<http://www.universityworldnews.com/article.php?story=20101029215749123>>

³⁰ National Planning Commission, *National Development Plan 2030: Our future – make it work* (National Planning Commission, 2012), p.319 <<http://www.poa.gov.za/news/Documents/NPC%20National%20Development%20Plan%20Vision%202030%20lo-res.pdf>>

³¹ Mohamedbhai, p.20

³² Barber, Donnelly, and Rizvi

doctoral shortages, specifically in Africa. The Commonwealth Scholarship Commission in the UK, which manages the operation of the Commonwealth Scholarship and Fellowship Plan (CSFP) in that country, has offered split-site doctoral scholarships as part of its portfolio of awards for over a decade. These aim to provide doctorates which use both local and international expertise, at lower cost than conventional international scholarships.

Other initiatives have the potential to be developed. Schemes to attract academics to work in developing countries have tended to focus on those at senior levels, who may be returning to their home country. An alternative approach might be the development of schemes to attract recently-qualified doctoral staff to start their careers in low or middle income countries, re-establishing a tradition that was quite prevalent in the 1960s and 1970s. There is potential for more bilateral arrangements between universities and governments, to expand and reduce the cost of international postgraduate study in their mutual interest.

In addition to increasing the supply of staff with doctorates, universities and governments also need to make better use of the ones that they already have. *The Nairobi Report*, the product of a major consultation organised by the Association of Commonwealth Universities and the British Academy in 2010, found that many staff in African universities, including those who had returned from obtaining their doctorates overseas, experienced a dangerous sense of isolation during the early part of their careers.³³ Resources were an element in this, but not the only factor.

The Nairobi Report recommended a range of remedies, including stronger mentoring, recognition of research needs when allocating administrative responsibilities, support for those producing their first publication and research funding applications, and better advice on how to access the range of electronic library facilities now available. The ACU has since launched two new initiatives in this area: a programme of early career fellowships for academics whose work is relevant to climate change within Africa (supported by the UK Department for International Development), and the production of a range of new materials and institution support structures (supported by the Bosch Foundation).

The development of early career academic staff offers scope for novel partnerships. Given the possibilities offered through modern technology, there is no reason why staff members should draw on the facilities, or consider themselves members of, one university only. Postdoctoral research posts, although available in many Commonwealth countries, are generally offered by individual universities rather than national schemes, and less well publicised than scholarships. A central source of information on these would be valuable. Where university staff have obtained doctorates at better-resourced institutions overseas, ways could be found for them to draw on contacts and facilities there, in ways that maintain motivation and enhance their contribution to their new employers. Policymakers in developed countries could encourage such relationships by rewarding them in their criteria for measuring university performance.

The Association of Commonwealth Universities (ACU) has taken the lead in supporting early career academics. Building on the **Nairobi Process** – a series of consultations looking at how to strengthen research in the humanities and social sciences in Africa – two recent projects particularly focus on enhancing institutional research support capacity.

The **Climate Impact Research Capacity and Leadership Enhancement in Sub-Saharan Africa** (CIRCLE) programme aims to develop the skills and research output of early career African researchers in the field of climate change and its local impacts on development. The programme offers post-Master's and postdoctoral fellowships for individuals, combined with support and training to develop the institutional research capacity of participating institutions. CIRCLE is funded by the UK Department for International Development (DFID) and managed by the ACU and the African Academy of Sciences (AAS).

The **Structured Training for African Researchers** (STARS) project works with African universities to develop and refine professional development for early career academic staff, in order to strengthen the long-term vitality of research and teaching activities. The project is piloting a series of online training modules, providing institutions with a mechanism through which they can extend and improve the support they are able to offer, and build the skills and confidence of early career academics. The STARS project is funded by Robert Bosch Stiftung and managed by the ACU.

³³ Jonathan Harle, *The Nairobi Report: Frameworks for Africa-UK Research Collaboration in the Social Sciences and Humanities* (The British Academy/The Association of Commonwealth Universities, 2009) <<https://www.acu.ac.uk/publication/download?id=174>>

Student and staff mobility

Does the Commonwealth influence mobility choices?

The vast majority of university students study entirely in their own country. The UNESCO estimate of 7 million internationally mobile students by 2020 will still represent only around 3% of the expanded pool of higher education students.³⁴

Yet international study is seen as disproportionately important. Developed Commonwealth countries such as Australia,³⁵ Canada,³⁶ and the United Kingdom have each launched specific plans for the 'internationalisation' of their higher education systems in the past two years.³⁷ Internationalisation is not only a concern of traditional importers of students. India's Vision 2030 document for higher education notes that 'India has emerged as a regional hub of education and attracts global learners from all over the world'.³⁸

The motives for these interventions vary. In some countries, universities have become dangerously dependent on revenue from tuition fees as a source of income. Some view internationalisation as a means of strengthening their domestic education systems or labour markets by attracting talent. Some recognise it as an effective way to contribute to international development. Most recognise the huge contribution that overseas students make to their domestic economy. The Australian draft strategy estimates that the international education sector contributes some AUD 16.3 billion to the national economy.³⁹

The Australian draft strategy also notes that the benefits of international education extend 'well beyond being a mainstay of our economy'.⁴⁰ It cites mutual benefit in terms of networks and mutual understanding. In the UK, evaluations undertaken by the Commonwealth Scholarship Commission confirm the strong international development value that scholarships can have. The strategies cited above stress the importance of outward – as well as inward – mobility in ensuring that their domestic students can draw on international experience. Such measures would also help provide much-needed geographical balance – at present mobility remains too concentrated on a small number of hosting countries.

Does membership of the Commonwealth have any impact on determining mobility patterns? The evidence suggests probably not, although there may be a close relationship between Commonwealth membership and factors that do influence student choices. Analysis of figures produced by the UNESCO Institute for Statistics suggests an uneven picture.⁴¹ Among the larger recruiters of international students, Australia, the UK and India bunch closely together, with between 25% and 28% of international students coming from Commonwealth countries, not too dissimilar from the Commonwealth's share of the total world population. Canada's proportion is even lower, at 18%. On the other hand, New Zealand's proportion is higher, at 38%. In South Africa, it reaches almost 40%, and would be over 65% were Zimbabwe still a member of the Commonwealth. Looking at the major 'sending' Commonwealth countries, proportions are higher. 67% of Nigerians who study overseas appear to do so in a Commonwealth country; in Malaysia the figure is 62%, and in Pakistan 47%. By comparison, larger Francophone countries, particularly in Africa, are more concentrated in their choices. 88% of Algerian students abroad study in France. In Senegal, the figure is 74%, and for Morocco and Gabon 65% and 61% respectively.

³⁴ Philip G Altbach, Liz Reisberg, and Laura E Rumbley, *Trends in Global Higher Education: Tracking an Academic Revolution* (UNESCO, 2009) <<http://www.uis.unesco.org/Library/Documents/trends-global-higher-education-2009-world-conference-en.pdf>>

³⁵ Australian Government, *Draft National Strategy for International Education (for consultation)* (Australian Government, 2015) <<https://internationaleducation.gov.au/International-network/Australia/InternationalStrategy/Documents/Draft%20National%20Strategy%20for%20International%20Education.pdf>>

³⁶ *Canada's International Education Strategy: Harnessing our knowledge advantage to drive innovation and prosperity* (Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development Canada, 2014) <<http://international.gc.ca/global-markets-marches-mondiaux/education/strategy-strategie.aspx?lang=eng>>

³⁷ HM Government, *International Education: Global Growth and Prosperity* (Department for Business, Innovation and Skills and Department for Education, 2013) <<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/international-education-strategy-global-growth-and-prosperity>>

³⁸ Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI) and Ernst & Young LLP, *Higher Education in India: Vision 2030*, FICCI Higher Education Summit 2013 (Ernst & Young LLP, 2013), p.7 <[http://www.ey.com/Publication/vwLUAssets/Higher-education-in-India-Vision-2030/\\$FILE/EY-Higher-education-in-India-Vision-2030.pdf](http://www.ey.com/Publication/vwLUAssets/Higher-education-in-India-Vision-2030/$FILE/EY-Higher-education-in-India-Vision-2030.pdf)>

³⁹ Australian Government, p.5

⁴⁰ Australian Government, p.1

⁴¹ UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 'Global flow of tertiary-level students' (05 May 2014) <<http://www.uis.unesco.org/Education/Pages/international-student-flow-viz.aspx>>

Several factors explain these differences. Regional dynamics are a major determinant of student flows. The high proportions reported for Francophone countries in Africa, for example, are not replicated in Asia. The figures for inward mobility remain disproportionately influenced by China – which alone accounted for 35% of Australian and 22% of Canadian inward students. Comparisons between Commonwealth and Francophone mobility are influenced by language factors, as English-speaking students have more mobility options. This is particularly expressed in the numbers of students going to the United States of America. France may also be a more natural choice for students from the Francophone world due to its favourable tuition fee policies.

Higher education is now regarded as a global market, with both leading institutions and the most talented students looking at options worldwide. Commonwealth membership, in itself, is not likely to be a significant influence on their choice. On the other hand, some of the factors associated with Commonwealth membership may be – such as language, historic ties, and the structure of the curriculum. This raises the question of whether the Commonwealth could do more to promote mobility among its member countries. This could be a mutually beneficial process, in which channels such as the Commonwealth Education Hub identify and link to opportunities at leading Commonwealth universities, who in return might make more of their funded opportunities available to Commonwealth students.

The role of scholarships

Only a small proportion of international students receive scholarships, but these can be disproportionately important in terms of talent and development impact. Scholarships also can be a particularly effective way of influencing wider student destinations – not only for recipients, but also for applicants who broaden their knowledge of course offers as part of the recruitment process. They are also an area in which the Commonwealth already has a high profile. The report on activity under the Commonwealth Scholarship and Fellowship Plan (CSFP), to be presented to Ministers at 19CCEM later on the agenda, suggests that leading Commonwealth universities might be interested in utilising the Commonwealth brand to create specific awards for citizens of Commonwealth countries.

Commonwealth initiatives also have the potential to promote two-way mobility across low, middle, and high income countries. Despite the growth of middle income destinations such as India, Malaysia, and South Africa, the flow of mobility remains heavily south to north. Through the endowment fund launched by Ministers at 17CCEM in 2009, the CSFP is making international scholarships available in new destinations. The CSFP report to 19CCEM identifies up to 15 countries where such awards have been advertised for 2015-2016. While the numbers of award holders will be small compared with overall student flows, such scholarships send out a powerful signal that indicates growing capacity in low and middle income countries to host international students.

Staff mobility

Opportunities for student mobility are generally well known. The same is not always true of mobility for university staff. We know of no international survey which quantifies these, but anecdotal evidence suggests that those opportunities that do exist are heavily concentrated on a small proportion of staff, who often form an ‘internationally-focused elite’, particularly in universities in low and middle income countries where

The CSFP endowment fund, established by Ministers at 17CCEM, supports Commonwealth Scholarships at universities in low and middle income countries. The fund builds on the reputation of one of the world’s most prestigious scholarship schemes – some 30,000 individuals from across the globe have already benefited from Commonwealth Scholarships and Fellowships. Scholarships are offered to citizens of all Commonwealth countries.

In 2015, Commonwealth Scholarships for Master’s level study were offered in the following countries:

- Bangladesh
- Botswana
- Cameroon
- Ghana
- Kenya
- Mauritius
- Pakistan
- Papua New Guinea
- Sri Lanka
- University of the South Pacific
- University of the West Indies

resources are most scarce. This concentration also manifests itself in the greater ability of those benefiting from such opportunities to develop wider international collaborations.

The need for international exposure to penetrate to wider groups of academics and students is being addressed by two existing Commonwealth initiatives. Following the success of a special scheme to mark its Centenary in 2013, the Association of Commonwealth Universities has confirmed that it will operate a programme to provide international travel grants for academics who have not previously had professional overseas experience. The Commonwealth Summer School, also instigated by the ACU, prioritises scholarships for postgraduate students who have not travelled outside their own region. These programmes are small – supporting between 80-100 individuals each year – but would form a good basis on which to build a wider Commonwealth initiative.

The ACU Early Career Academic Grants enable emerging academics from across the Commonwealth to attend conferences or academic meetings in other Commonwealth countries, thereby broadening their horizons and developing key international contacts.

Being able to make this trip has made a great contribution to both my short and long-term development as a young academic.

Chisala Ng'andwe, Stellenbosch University, South Africa
– 2014 Early Career Academic Grant winner

This great experience enriched my knowledge and raised my motivation levels.

Shahina Yasmin, Riphah International University, Pakistan
– 2014 Early Career Academic Grant winner

What can the Commonwealth do?

The official Commonwealth has limited resources to intervene in higher education. The discussion above therefore focuses on issues that lend well to international action, where the Commonwealth can draw on external resources, and where there is existing branding that can be built upon.

Huge potential exists to utilise existing Commonwealth structures and branding. The Commonwealth of Learning, Commonwealth Youth Programme, and Commonwealth Tertiary Education Facility are existing routes, funded by governments in the name of the Commonwealth. The Association of Commonwealth Universities already brings together over 500 Commonwealth institutions. Other professional bodies, and the newly-established Commonwealth Students Association, represent key stakeholders in higher education. The Commonwealth Scholarship and Fellowship Plan has trained over 35,000 individuals, many of whom are in senior positions and still in contact with the scheme; it is commonly cited as one of the most visible and well-known Commonwealth programmes.

Collectively, these can add up to a significant Commonwealth presence, which can act as:

1. A **voice for change** (for example, by campaigning for higher education to be recognised in future international development goals).
2. A **catalyst for partnerships**, between governments, universities, and the public and private sectors.
3. A **forum for exchange** of good practice and ideas (for example, the major conference on relations between universities, employment and society which the Association of Commonwealth Universities is planning for 2016).
4. A **force for innovation** in key areas (for example, through the programmes of the Commonwealth of Learning and Commonwealth Scholarship and Fellowship Plan).
5. A **'neutral' space** for governments who might otherwise see themselves as competitors over issues such as student recruitment and 'brain drain'.
6. A **channel to connect** governments and key users of university graduates and research, through the existing networks of professional associations.
7. A **champion of inclusion**, through bodies such as the Commonwealth Students Association, initiatives of the Commonwealth of Learning, Commonwealth Scholarships, and the Gender Programme run by the Association of Commonwealth Universities.
8. A **stimulus for generating new resources**, especially where small seed-corn funding can be raised (for example, the CSFP endowment fund launched at 17CCEM in 2009).
9. A **provider of information and advice** to governments (for example, through the reports of the Commonwealth Tertiary Education Facility).

A specific agenda

While the official Commonwealth is unlikely to devote significant resources to a concerted higher education initiative, this paper has identified a number of specific initiatives that could be pursued, with little or no additional central investment, through channels that already exist or through enhanced support from individual Commonwealth governments. These include:

- Political recognition – including through the communique of this CCEM – of the important role that higher education plays in the economic and social development of member states.
- Greater use of existing Commonwealth websites and other resources to highlight study and fellowship opportunities available in Commonwealth countries – particular in areas such as postdoctoral fellowships, where information is not currently brought together in a single place.

- Continued and increased support by member governments for initiatives such as the Commonwealth Scholarship and Fellowship Plan, Commonwealth of Learning, and Commonwealth Tertiary Education Facility – all of which will report separately to Ministers at 19CCEM.
- Leading the way in demonstrating the potential for student mobility to be a two-way process, through support for the CSFP endowment fund, which supports Commonwealth Scholarships based in low and middle income countries.
- Recognition of novel programmes instigated by non-governmental Commonwealth bodies, such as the Association of Commonwealth Universities, as ‘official’ Commonwealth activities, which could appeal to member governments for support. Examples include the Commonwealth Summer School and a new fund to support international mobility for early career academic staff without previous overseas experience.
- Fostering collaboration between governments to improve data in critical areas such as the student voice on higher education, and statistics concerning graduate employment.
- Harnessing existing Commonwealth professional groups to discuss topics of mutual interest – for example, though the major conference planned by the Association of Commonwealth Universities, in conjunction with Ghanaian universities, for 2016, which will explore practical approaches to the relationship between universities, business and society.

A Commonwealth voice for higher education

The main purpose of this paper has been to facilitate discussion between member states on key issues surrounding higher education. It also suggests, however, that by fully recognising the value of existing initiatives, and perhaps harnessing small-scale support from member governments, the potential exists to develop a more coherent and visible Commonwealth voice in higher education by the time of the next CCEM in 2018.

Acknowledgements

This paper was written by Dr John Kirkland, Deputy Secretary General of the Association of Commonwealth Universities, as part of a short sabbatical period at the University of Pretoria, to which the author extends his sincere thanks.