

8

Centring the power

With the Dawkins Reforms ‘bedded down’ and international education policy settings adjusted after the Jackson and Goldring reports, the late 1980s were a time of significant change within Australian higher education. This is a period often marked as the turning point, where the international education in Australia moved from being a sector to an ‘industry’ – from aid to trade.¹

This chapter discusses in depth one of the outcomes of the negotiations between the Jackson and Goldring reports: the Equity and Merit Scholarship Scheme (EMSS), which was also influenced by an international economic environment that put stress on the Australian Government’s budget. The focus of the EMSS was not the Pacific. The design was far more focused on managing the flow of students from Malaysia, and seeking to mitigate the possible diplomatic damage from ending the subsidy scheme. While the focus of scholarship designers was on South-East Asia, the political and security situation in the Pacific became far more tumultuous, with missile tests and military coups drawing the attention of the foreign policy community. The previous approaches that had marked much of Australia’s foreign policy towards the Pacific could not continue in the face of these challenges. It was these issues that forced the designers of the EMSS to make the scheme regionally led, as discussed throughout this chapter, while shifting important levers of control to Canberra.

1 Eric Meadows, ‘From Aid to Industry: A History of International Education in Australia’, in *Making a Difference: Australian International Education*, ed. Dorothy Davis and Bruce Mackintosh (Sydney: University of New South Wales Press, 2011).

The EMSS was a significant 'new' scholarship scheme. It differed in approach, theory of change and implementation mode from all other schemes the Australian Government had designed or participated in since the 1940s. It was short lived but, much like the Colombo Plan, it laid the foundations for subsequent schemes, and elements of the scheme were genuinely novel in their approach to scholarship design. It bucked the trend of iterative adjustments that had marked scholarship implementation for most of the period covered by this book.

The contours of the Cold War shifted during the 1980s, as the relationship between the USSR and the USA evolved, and the USSR loosened its grip on its satellite states. The Pacific's position in global affairs was also changing. The period was marked by difficulties in many of Australia's bilateral relationships with Pacific nations. Two coups in Fiji in 1987 tested the relationship between Australia and an independent Fiji, which had been relatively strong to that point. The coups themselves were motivated by various political, social and ethnic conflicts that had existed in Fiji for decades, certainly since independence in 1970, where many issues had been papered over rather than addressed. In the area of education, there was a perception that Indigenous Fijians were less able to access education than their Indian Fijian contemporaries.² These issues of access were driven by a Fijian narrative contending that Indigenous Fijians have been disadvantaged in education by virtue of their unpreparedness for Western life and Western education. This narrative persisted into the 1980s, with stereotyping by race leading to some government scholarship programs only being open to ethnic Fijians, and higher university entrance scores required by ethnic Indian students.³ According to Carmen White:

this is indicative of a conventional wisdom in Fiji that seeks an explanation for educational disparities in innate Fijian characteristics and suggests that Fijian childrearing practices and customs fail to stimulate academic interests and achievement.⁴

2 Padmini Gaunder, *Education and Race Relations in Fiji 1835–1998* (Fiji: Padmini Gaunder, 1999).

3 Carmen M White, 'Affirmative Action and Education in Fiji: Legitimation, Contestation, and Colonial Discourse', *Harvard Educational Review*, no. 2 (2001): 240–68, doi.org/10.17763/haer.71.2.p1057320407582t0.

4 White, 'Affirmative Action and Education in Fiji', 251.

These broader narratives of disadvantage were part of what led to the coups, with other issues such as a rebalancing of political power away from chiefly leadership playing perhaps a more important role. But as Sanjay Ramesh noted, these coups ensured ‘a majority of the population, particularly Indo-Fijians, were politically marginalised and socially ostracised’.⁵

The Hawke Labor Government decided in 1987, in response to the first coup, to stop aid.⁶ That decision was reversed quickly, and aid was flowing again by 1988. These coups not only impacted on Australian (and other nations’) aid to Fiji, but importantly, affected higher education delivery and access in Fiji and by extension (because of the University of the South Pacific, or USP), across Pacific Island countries.

Pacific stability was also challenged in 1988 with the beginnings of a separatist conflict in Bougainville and what was been described as an ‘incipient civil war’ also occurring in New Caledonia.⁷ Australia did not provide direct military aid to Papua New Guinea (PNG) to support its efforts to maintain control in Bougainville, but indirect military aid and significant non-military aid continued to PNG during the period.⁸ In the case of New Caledonia, Australia maintained a level of support for self-determination.

The issue of nuclear testing in the Pacific continued to haunt a number of relationships the Hawke Government had in the Pacific, with concerns being raised about Australia’s loyalties to both the USA (via the Australia, New Zealand and United States ANZUS treaty) and commitments to its Pacific neighbours. This was very clear in the case of the MX missile tests, where the Hawke Government allowed the USA to test MX missiles in the waters of the Western Pacific off the coast of Tasmania. This military activity had first occurred in 1981 under the Fraser Government. The decision to allow the tests, and perhaps more importantly not to inform the Australian public about them, was blamed for a significant drop in the popularity of

5 Sanjay Ramesh, ‘Reflections on the 1987 Fiji Coups’, *Fijian Studies: A Journal of Contemporary Fiji* 5, no. 1 (2007): 164–78.

6 Jeannie Zakharov, ‘Cabinet Decides to Stop Aid to Fiji’, *Canberra Times*, 30 September 1987.

7 Denise Fisher, ‘New Caledonia’s Independence Referendum: Local and Regional Implications’, *The Lowy Institute* (blog), 8 May 2019, www.loyyinstitute.org/publications/new-caledonia-s-independence-referendum-local-regional-implications, accessed 31 March 2023.

8 The use of helicopters donated by the Australian Government was especially controversial.

the Hawke Government in 1985.⁹ New Zealand's nuclear ban was a marked point of difference between Australia and New Zealand in their policies in the Pacific, which put strain on Australia's relationship with the USA under the ANZUS treaty. The nuclear ban, which meant that New Zealand refused to allow nuclear-powered submarines to visit its ports, led to the USA suspending its ANZUS treaty obligations to New Zealand in 1986. For the Pacific Island countries themselves, regionalism was a key focus as they sought to establish themselves as independent states and manage the militarisation of their region.

In an overview of Australian education aid to the Pacific during this period, Elizabeth Cassity notes that decision-making processes within the Australian Hawke Government and bureaucracy at the time were 'ruptured by political instability'.¹⁰ This sense of instability created circumstances where Australian policymakers were often overly keen to exercise more decision-making power than their bilateral aid partners were comfortable with. This is explored further in this chapter.

First, however, this chapter examines the Equity and Merit Scholarship Scheme, which was designed within the Australian International Development Assistance Bureau (AIDAB, formerly known as ADAB, the Australian Development Assistance Bureau), with input from other departments including the Department of Education and the Department of Immigration. The scheme represented a significant shift in the delivery and administration of Australian Government development scholarships, and in many ways established the underpinning infrastructure of both scholarship administration and student recruitment that exists in Australia to the present day.

The Equity and Merit Scholarship Scheme

After it failed to fully address the issues raised in 1984 after the Goldring and Jackson reports, the Hawke Government decided the budget could no longer sustain the growing number of overseas student subsidies and the program

9 David Lee, 'Australia's Ambassadors in Washington, 1982–89', in *Australia Goes to Washington: 75 Years of Australian Representation in the United States, 1940–2015*, ed. David Lowe, David Lee, and Carl Bridge, 183–207 (Canberra: ANU Press, 2016), doi.org/10.22459/AGTW.12.2016.10; and Steve Lohr, 'MX Reversal by Australian Isn't Popular', *The New York Times*, 24 February 1985, 12.

10 Elizabeth Cassity, 'Cast the Net a Little Wider: Australian Aid in the South Pacific', *International Journal of Educational Development* 28, (2008): 255, doi.org/10.1016/j.ijedudev.2006.12.003.

had to end. This was also in line with recommendations from the Jackson Report (as discussed in the previous chapter). This was a difficult decision from both diplomatic and development perspectives. Diplomatically, the subsidy program had helped to develop and strengthen ties with countries in the region, in particular Malaysia. Developing countries in South-East Asia and the Pacific had also appreciated the program, which allowed them to send students to study in Australia on government scholarships for a fraction of what it might have otherwise cost. This was an indirect contribution to human resource development programs across the Pacific and South-East Asia. The EMSS was pitched to these nations, especially Malaysia, as the transitional program to ease the pain of the removal of subsidies.

As this chapter outlines, the introduction of the new scholarship scheme took time and was not without problems. The removal of the subsidy scheme represented a tangible cut in funding for universities, with fewer students coming from overseas after the subsidy scheme was ended; the EMSS was designed to soften that blow.¹¹

Most importantly, however, the scheme marked a significant change in the way the Australian Government administered scholarships, and the way in which they were viewed in Australia and in recipient nations. Where schemes in the past had used the themes and frameworks provided by the Colombo Plan, and had stuck to a similar script, the EMSS marked a shift. These variations reverberated through subsequent scholarship programs implemented by Australian Governments, both Coalition and Labor.

In moving from a subsidy program to a scholarship program, the government justified the change by pointing to significant issues in the broad nature of the subsidy scheme. Foreign Minister Gareth Evans was quoted in the *Canberra Times* in 1988, at the time of the EMSS announcement, as saying 'this has caused aid funds to be channelled to relatively prosperous countries at the expense of those demonstrating greatest need'.¹² By framing the program as a shift, rather than a reduction, Minister Evans provided

11 The subsidy scheme allowed for universities to seek full cost recovery from the government, while the government in turn passed only approximately 25 per cent of that on through the Overseas Student Charge (OSC). The OSC was waived entirely for students from Pacific Island countries. Thus, a reduction in the number of students coming to Australia for study was going to have a tangible impact on the financial health of Australian universities and colleges.

12 'Scholarships Replace Subsidies', *Canberra Times*, 19 December 1988, 2.

a rationale for the new scholarship program that highlighted its benefits. He noted that the scholarship program was going to cost the same amount as the subsidy program.¹³

Prior to the ending of the subsidy scheme, the Department of Foreign Affairs and AIDAB were aware that ending the scheme was going to cause problems for many neighbouring countries. The subsidy scheme widened access to higher education for many who did not have access to university study in their own country and it had become a part of long-term planning for many families. Parents of students from Malaysia who had sent their children to study in Australia for high school under the subsidy system were suddenly facing the prospect of full fees for university education. The National Liaison Committee for Overseas Students Australia wrote to Foreign Minister Gareth Evans to complain about the changing policy:

The long-established subsidised programme has made it possible for overseas students to gain entrance into tertiary education at prices that an average middle-class family could afford.¹⁴

This was well understood by the designers of the EMSS; much of the impetus behind the 'equity' element of the EMSS stemmed from this concern.

The Equity and Merit Scholarship Scheme (EMSS),¹⁵ a working title which was then chosen as the final name, was workshopped over the course of a few years, almost longer than the scheme itself existed. Overseas posts were consulted by the Department of Foreign Affairs and AIDAB. The Department of Education, Austrade and the Department of Industry, Technology and Commerce were also part of the working group. The working group also consulted with the Australian Vice-Chancellors' Committee (AVCC). The scholarship program was not the only scholarship program being managed by AIDAB; Development Training Awards continued as they had since the 1970s. However, there was a sense within AIDAB that the new scheme represented 'a major improvement in training assistance in the Australian aid program'.¹⁶ This was not only because of the design elements within the scholarship scheme, but also because the

13 This represented a smaller subsidy program than the one that had existed earlier in the decade as cuts to the subsidy program had begun around 1986.

14 'Letter from National Liaison Committee Overseas Students' Australia to FM Evans, 18 May 1989', A4250, 1989/792, National Archives of Australia (NAA).

15 EMSS was the working title for the scheme. Despite a number of other suggestions for names, including the Sir Percy Spender Scholarships, the EMSS name was retained for the implementation of the scheme.

16 'EMSS Progress Report to 31 July 1989', A4250, 1989/792, NAA.

subsidy scheme it was replacing was un-targeted and did not address specific development needs of recipient countries. AIDAB bureaucrats also felt that the scheme offered an opportunity for the bureau to demonstrate its value. A document prepared for the AIDAB Executive by the AIDAB Policy Branch noted that AIDAB would be under scrutiny about the scholarship scheme from parliament, the public and ministers, but ‘we have fought for the opportunity, now we have to show we can deliver the goods’.¹⁷

The key features around which the scheme was designed were what set the program apart from other scholarship programs that the Australian Government had implemented in the past. These features included gender parity, the selection of awardees being independent of partner governments, and students being allowed to pursue any field of study.¹⁸ The attention of the program on being open to all, and very much focused on the individual and their needs, was significantly different to all previous schemes. Partner governments had been significantly involved in selection, and individuals were selected on the basis of how their skills could be part of a broader country development plan. It is clear that the EMSS represented a very significant diversion from the normal practice of government-funded scholarship schemes. The scheme also aimed to have students treated in Australia in the same way as private overseas students, a ‘mainstreaming’ of students rather than being singled out as part of the Australian Aid Program.

The scheme diverted from its foundational principles only slightly during the final stages of design, largely due to changing circumstances and political and diplomatic calculations. A temporary cohort of ‘Year 12’ scholarships was introduced by AIDAB, where students in their final year of schooling in Australia were able to apply for EMSS scholarships. This was to cater for students who had commenced high schooling in Australia with the expectation of continuing to university with subsidised fees. The belief was that once that cohort was cleared from the system, that scholarship category would no longer be necessary.¹⁹

The scheme itself was framed by the designers within the bureaucracy as being directly linked to the recommendations of the Jackson Review, which had called for a significant scholarship program to ensure Australia’s obligations to its developing country neighbours were met if the subsidy

17 ‘Notes for Executive on Getting the EMSS up and Running | 16 December’, A4250, 1990/801, 1988, NAA.

18 ‘EMSS Progress Report to 31 July 1989’, A4250, 1989/792, NAA.

19 ‘EMSS Progress Report to 31 July 1989’, A4250, 1989/792, NAA.

program was removed. A close reading of documents recording the planning and implementation of the program shows that this is only partially true. Diplomats and bureaucrats within AIDAB expressed significant concerns for how the removal of the subsidy scheme would be received by developing nations, particularly those nations that had made use of it for their own government scholarships. Staff within AIDAB were aware that removing the subsidy scheme would, at the very least, look like a cut to Australia's aid activity. It was noted in a Cabinet submission regarding the ending of the subsidy scheme, and introduction of the scholarship program: 'The aid component of the new scholarship scheme would enable the Government to announce a major aid initiative focused on our region.'²⁰ This concern was acute in the Pacific region: while the program was intended to 'cover' the same number of students as the subsidy scheme, a cablegram to the High Commission in Fiji noted the government 'may not have wished to be seen to be reducing its support for Pacific students at this time'.²¹ Fiji had been a significant source of students under the subsidy scheme, both with private students and students sponsored by the Fijian Government,²² so the ending of subsidies was likely to have a noticeable impact.

In a significant shift in the nature of Australian development scholarships, a decision was made by the EMSS designers that the scholarship program would involve candidate selection by the Australian Government and their representatives, rather than relying on nominations from recipient countries. A note regarding the details of the program as of February 1989 stated that while recipient governments were to be involved in the Memoranda of Understanding outlining the programs within each country, they were 'not to be involved in final selection of students'.²³ This significant change to the status quo came out of concerns from, among others, diplomats²⁴ who had noticed discriminatory policies in scholarship selection. For example, the ethnic mix of students from Fiji was of concern, given the fact that government scholarships were largely restricted to Indigenous Fijian students, not Fijians of other ethnic groups such as Fijian Indians. Australian diplomats based in the Pacific during the coups in Fiji in 1987 saw the rhetoric around race,

20 'Overseas Student Policy Review Cabinet Submission | Draft | 21 November', A4250, 1990/801, 1988, NAA.

21 'Aid: Equity and Merit Scholarship Scheme (Cablegram Canberra to Suva) 22/03/1989', A4250 1989/792, NAA.

22 'Aid: Equity and Merit Scholarship Scheme (Cablegram Canberra to Suva) 22/03/1989', A4250 1989/792, NAA.

23 'EMSS: Design Issues for Task Force Meeting, 7 February 1989', A4250, 1989/792, NAA.

24 'Aid: Malaysia: Programming Visit (Cablegram), 11 February 1989', A4250, 1989/792, NAA.

and preferential treatment based on race, as it was discussed openly. These discussions continued in Fiji after the coups, a letter to the editor in the *Fiji Times* in 1988 wrote of how iTaukei had been:

branded as failures in business, lazy workers, suitable only for “labour” jobs, constantly filling the prisons, failures in high schools and university, and this degradation has formulated a negative self-image in us.²⁵

A cablegram from diplomats in Malaysia noted that concerns about the Fijian program would be replicated in Malaysia, ‘it is possible that a similar concern could arise in respect of the Malaysian program’,²⁶ which had similarly discriminatory selection policies based on race, giving preference to ethnic Malays over Chinese or Indian Malays. These concerns were further compounded when the Prime Minister of Malaysia visited Fiji in 1988, stressing to Indian Fijians that they should accept the realities of the coup, and accept the draft constitution, with its embedded discrimination. Dr Mahathir Mohamad claimed that ‘the Malays, like Fijians, were not successful in business but the Malaysian government had set out programmes of participation that Fiji could learn from’.²⁷

The working group was fully aware of this rhetoric. They were also bound by Australian legislation regarding equal opportunity and concerns for the development outcomes that could be jeopardised by a racially prejudiced selection policy.

As noted earlier, the scheme was designed around a number of fundamental principles. These were explained by a consultant (WL Mellor) in his administrative review of the program in 1990 as being:

- a. an ‘open to all’ approach
- b. academic merit as the primary selection criterion within both the Merit and Equity categories
- c. a focus on the needs of individuals and on their choices in terms of courses of study and institutions
- d. a new administrative approach which treated aid-funded students as far as possible as private students within Australia.²⁸

25 Samisoni Tiko, ‘Letters to the Editor: Alien System’, *The Fiji Times*, 11 November 1988, 6.

26 ‘Aid: Malaysia: Programming Visit (Cablegram), 11 February 1989’, A4250, 1989/792, NAA.

27 ‘Fiji Indians Must Accept Reality – Malaysian PM’, *The Fiji Times*, 4 November 1988, 1.

28 WL Mellor, ‘Equity and Merit Scholarship Scheme, 1990 Administrative Review’, A4250, 1990/1349, NAA, 7.

That the design included the concept of self-nomination by candidates was seen as an ‘innovative approach to development and training in the Third World context’.²⁹ There was an assumption that this less rigid approach to selection of candidates, and the subjects they studied, would lead to development within the recipient nations. This positive assumption, as has been noted in other research, is endemic in scholarship design and can be problematic.³⁰

Rather than being entirely managed from Canberra, the scheme was operated out of diplomatic posts in target countries. This practical necessity allowed for tailoring of each country’s cohort, and also fit well within the changing structure of Australian aid into ‘Country Programs’, as recommended by the Jackson Report. However, the close involvement of posts was not part of the original design, which had sought to:

distance the control of the scheme from the Australian Government so that it would be perceived to be more in the hands of Australian educational institutions than of the Australian Government.³¹

The diverse cohort of students from across many countries and development contexts was better managed through the involvement of posts. However, depending on the national setting, this also gave partner governments more influence on selection.

A foundational element of this new scholarship program was the notion of equity. The bureaucrats designing the scholarship believed that this element was the key development aspect of the scholarship, and would ensure it achieved individual and societal development outcomes once the student returned home. The design of the scholarship program meant that those on ‘Merit’ awards were supported through fee-only scholarships, while those on ‘Equity’ scholarships were supported by fee and stipend scholarships.

29 WL Mellor, ‘Equity and Merit Scholarship Scheme, 1990 Administrative Review’, A4250, 1990/1349, NAA, 7.

30 For discussion about the problematic nature of the assumptions of positive outcomes from scholarships see: Joan Dassin, Robin Marsh, and Matt Mawer, ‘Introduction: Pathways for Social Change?’, in *International Scholarships and Higher Education: Pathways for Social Change*, ed. Joan Dassin, Robin Marsh, and Matt Mawer, 3–21 (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-62734-2; and Anna Kent, ‘Australian Development Scholarships and Their Place within Diplomacy, Development and Education’, Master’s thesis, University of Melbourne, 2012; and Anna Kent, ‘Recent Trends in International Scholarships’, in Dassin, Marsh and Mawer, *International Scholarship in Higher Education*, 23–42.

31 ‘EMSS Progress Report to 31 July 1989’, A4250, 1989/792, NAA.

To this end, the selection criteria around equity were determined by each post, allowing the factors important in each country to be considered. In the Pacific, the concept was applied in different ways. In New Caledonia, family income was assessed and gender equity was a key element across the Pacific.³² In PNG, deciding on the equity criteria involved the PNG Government. A record of a meeting was recounted by an Australian diplomat in a cable to Canberra, noting that the discussion around equity criteria had been difficult, in part because:

... we suggested applicants who had graduated from a (government) National High School (as opposed to International High Schools or overseas high schools as one equity criteria). Officials reluctantly agreed (several had students at Port Moresby International High School).³³

This incident mirrors the conversations at the time of independence, discussed in an earlier chapter, wherein Australian diplomats were trapped between obligations to support the stated PNG education policy and the desires of senior politicians for their family members to be educated in Australia.

As the program was implemented, it was clear that the Equity cohort had higher needs in Australian universities. They often required more English language training, bridging and foundational courses and other support. A 1990 administrative review of the EMSS noted that as these students progressed through their studies it was important to monitor them, not least because:

an unduly high failure rate could give rise to concern both for the individual student and for relationships with those Governments that expressed disquiet at their exclusion from the nomination and selection process.³⁴

The inclusion of equity was important to make the scheme truly a part of the program of Overseas Development Assistance. There was uneven application of the concept of equity. This was considered important to ensure the country-specific issues were addressed, but it also caused

32 WL Mellor, 'Equity and Merit Scholarship Scheme, 1990 Administrative Review', A4250, 1990/1349, NAA.

33 'Cablegram Port Moresby to Canberra, 9 May', A4250, 1989/735, NAA.

34 WL Mellor, 'Equity and Merit Scholarship Scheme, 1990 Administrative Review', A4250, 1990/1349, NAA, 8.

difficulties for bureaucrats, diplomats, educational institutions and the students themselves. A draft review report in 1990, reflecting on the first cohort of students, noted that in the 'definition and application of Equity criteria a balance needs to be struck between an acknowledgement of social and economic disadvantage and their ability to cope with tertiary studies in Australia'.³⁵ This tension of different rules, and country-specific elements, did however offer a new approach for the Pacific Island nations. All previous scholarship programs were designed with other nations in mind (for example the Australian International Awards Scheme which was designed for South-East Asia) and did not necessarily meet the specific needs of Pacific Island nations. The EMSS design was adaptable to some of the unique needs of these smaller states.

At the other end of the spectrum, there was disquiet about the possibility of those with means being awarded Equity (rather than Merit) scholarships because of their countries of origin. This was of concern to the working group developing the next iteration of the scholarship scheme, 'the fact that wealthy Filipinos, Thais and Indonesians benefit from this arrangement has not passed without comment'.³⁶ Only Hong Kong and Singapore were restricted to fee-only scholarships, while other countries including Nepal, Pakistan and Malaysia offered both Equity and Merit awards.

As noted earlier, the EMSS was intended to provide support to Australian universities as they managed the transition from the overseas student subsidy program to the full fee-paying international student system. The EMSS program costs were framed around spending the 'savings' from the overseas subsidy scheme on fees (replacing the income lost by universities). However, because the EMSS students were able to choose their destination institution, the funds were distributed unevenly across the sector. Some institutions, such as the University of New South Wales and the University of Melbourne were able to gain significant revenue from the EMSS program, while other universities were unable to make up for the loss of the Commonwealth subsidy program through the EMSS.³⁷ These adjustments were occurring at the same time as the changes to the

35 'Draft Report of the EMSS Review', A4250, 1990/1349, NAA.

36 'Report of Working Group – JCSS – Integration into Country Programs', A4250, 1991/2160, 1991, NAA.

37 WL Mellor, 'Equity and Merit Scholarship Scheme, 1990 Administrative Review', A4250, 1990/1349, NAA, 9.

university sector via the Dawkins Reforms were being implemented.³⁸ As discussed in the previous chapter, this included the imposition of fees onto the domestic student population and the growth in number of full fee-paying international students. This added a layer of complexity to the implementation of a new scholarship scheme.

The EMSS was a much larger scholarship program than many of its predecessors, particularly in the Pacific. In the planning, the goal was to provide 600 scholarships (Equity and Merit) allocated across particular countries, and 350 scholarships (Merit only) for students from 20 eligible countries who were completing their Year 12 in Australia by the middle of 1989.³⁹ In the early phase of designing the EMSS program, bureaucrats believed that after the subsidy scheme was removed, for the 'South Pacific the new program would provide the same student numbers in Australian higher education as under the subsidised scheme'.⁴⁰ The first round of the awards included 198 scholarships for Pacific Island nations, including 55 for Fiji, 50 for PNG and 20 for both Tonga and Western Samoa.⁴¹ There were also 19 regional scholarships awarded to scholars from the Cook Islands, Kiribati, Niue and Tuvalu. A cablegram from Canberra to the Australian High Commission in Fiji explained the decisions around numbers in this way:

The number of scholarships for the South Pacific was drawn up with a close eye on the existing numbers of private students from the South Pacific in Australian Higher Education Institutions. In the past AIDAB has paid the overseas student charge for every private student from the South Pacific. The total number which was set for the South Pacific in the first year would in fact have delivered a smaller number of students from the South Pacific into Australia in 1990 than had started higher education courses in 1989, if no students had purchased places on their own account.⁴²

38 In addition to fee changes and the introduction of the Higher Education Contribution Scheme (HECS), the Dawkins reforms included the consolidation of Colleges of Adult Education (CAEs) into universities.

39 'Meeting of National Liaison Committee Overseas Students Australia', A4250, 1990/801, 1989, NAA.

40 'Overseas Student Policy Review Cabinet Submission | Draft | 21 November', A4250, 1990/801, 1988, NAA.

41 WL Mellor, 'Equity and Merit Scholarship Scheme, 1990 Administrative Review', A4250, 1990/1349, NAA.

42 'Aid: Equity and Merit Scholarship Scheme (Cablegram Canberra to Suva) 22/03/1989', A4250 1989/792, NAA.

The 1992 intake included 80 awards for Fiji and PNG respectively, each representing 9 per cent of the total number of awards in that intake. The following year was significantly smaller in number, with 34 awards each; however, it still represented a 9 per cent share each.⁴³

These numbers did not rival those available to other larger countries such as Indonesia and Malaysia, but both Malaysia and Indonesia had much larger populations than any Pacific states. However, they represented a large number of students to be taken out of the education systems of the Pacific Island states. This was an issue for both the Australian Government and the recipient governments. The regional university system, the USP and other universities in the region were undermined by the EMSS, especially as students were able to choose their own courses, even if that course was being offered in the region.

The shaping and administration of the EMSS was as part of the aid program, and remained an element of bilateral aid funding. However, by the nature of its implementation and design it was at times interpreted by recipient governments as outside the normal government-to-government approach to aid funding. Rushed implementation without Memoranda of Understanding between the Australian Government and the recipient governments led some local authorities to view it as ‘a “private” matter, rather than a government-to-government project’.⁴⁴ The foundational element of the scheme, the idea that ‘all comers’ were welcome, was a key issue of concern for some partner governments, who were unused to being cut out of selection decisions when it came to scholarships. Posts were given substantial freedom to make decisions around the scholarships, without the imposition of the partner government viewpoint. This represented a significant change. It was an explicitly stated element of the program that the scholarship was focused on ‘individual needs and personal development’⁴⁵ rather than broader sector development.

Some partner governments were happy to participate in the program on this basis, but there were others who did not share the view that ‘enhancing the individual development of “all comers” necessarily enhances national development’ and met this development ‘with polite scepticism in many

43 ‘Overseas Students Programs – New Arrangements | Ministerial Submission | 19 December’, A4250, 1991/2160, 1991, NAA.

44 WL Mellor, ‘Equity and Merit Scholarship Scheme, 1990 Administrative Review’, A4250, 1990/1349, NAA, 11.

45 ‘EMSS Progress Report to 31 July 1989’, A4250, 1989/792, NAA.

cases'.⁴⁶ The impact of the program on recipient government training and human resource development plans was of significant concern to some small Pacific nations.

For some recipient nations the objections were vague and unspecific, while others were able to point to specific reservations. The PNG Government reported that:

the design and operation of the EMSS scheme had actually caused some disruption of manpower plans and introduced negative 'ripple effects' upon the training of other individuals whose programs could be delayed or jeopardised.⁴⁷

The Tongan Government was disappointed with the EMSS programs, and noted in a joint review of scholarships in 1991⁴⁸ that three highly trained medical practitioners (from a very small population of qualified personnel) were going to Australia under the EMSS, against the wishes of the Tongan Government.⁴⁹

The involvement of recipient governments was worrying to the designers of the scheme for a number of important reasons. It was clear that racially discriminatory policies like those employed by the Malaysian and Fijian governments were in mind when the EMSS designers removed selection from recipient governments. The designers also understood that issues of gender equity and nepotism had at different times been noted in the selection of scholarship students in the decades leading up to the EMSS implementation, as has been explained in previous chapters.

Nevertheless, many recipient governments resented the distance inbuilt into the EMSS. Many posts did keep their host governments informed of activities and selections, but recipient governments wanted, and in some cases felt they needed, a louder voice in the process. But always in the minds of the administrators of the scheme, and the posts implementing it, was 'the capacity of Government to propose names of potential awardees on

46 WL Mellor, 'Equity and Merit Scholarship Scheme, 1990 Administrative Review', A4250, 1990/1349, NAA, 11.

47 WL Mellor, 'Equity and Merit Scholarship Scheme, 1990 Administrative Review', A4250, 1990/1349, NAA, 12.

48 The joint review was an Australian, New Zealand and Tongan government review that looked at both Tongan and Australian Government scholarships, including the EMSS.

49 'Tonga Scholarships Scheme Review – Background Briefing | March 1991', A4250, 1990/4203, NAA.

some other basis than merit or equity'.⁵⁰ Nevertheless, the reviews of the program after the first year of implementation noted 'EMSS was generally welcomed by participating countries although some insist on some degree of involvement in the selection of candidates for scholarships'.⁵¹ AIDAB reluctantly conceded that some involvement of partner governments would be inevitable.

With the program operating somewhat separately from the recipient governments, there was concern that it would lead to brain drain: the exodus of well-educated and trained individuals from the developing countries of the Pacific. This was an acute issue, especially in light of the development of higher educational institutions such as USP. This worry was voiced by Fijian academic and politician Tupeni Baba in 1989 when he wrote that selection being undertaken in Australia:

means that Australian institutes through AIDAB machinery would cream off the best Pacific students who could have gone to universities in the region. This ... would have the effect of undermining local institutions.⁵²

This issue was not new, but the significant shift of moving selection to the donor, rather than the recipient, highlighted the issue. The 'brain drain' impact of the EMSS on Fiji was greater than other parts of the South Pacific, as the candidate pool for Fiji was larger than expected in the early intakes of the EMSS. This was in contrast to the rest of the South Pacific, where the candidate pools were smaller. This was met with disquiet by scholarship administrators, who thought that the 'situation may deteriorate in future years as the pool of potential candidates is drained by the numbers of awardees'.⁵³

The EMSS lasted only three intakes, nevertheless it was reviewed a number of times. This reflected the growing trend for aid evaluations, and the nature of the program, which was so different to previous scholarship programs. The first review was undertaken following the arrival of the first students in

50 WL Mellor, 'Equity and Merit Scholarship Scheme, 1990 Administrative Review', A4250, 1990/1349, NAA, 13.

51 'Draft Report of the EMSS Review', A4250, 1990/1349, NAA.

52 Tupeni Baba, *The Business of Australian Aid: Education, Training and Development – The Marjorie Smart Lecture for 1989: Tupeni Baba; and a Summary of the Proceedings of a Subsequent Panel Discussion Edited by D.R. Jones, V.L. Meek and J. Weeks*, ed. David R Jones, V Lynn Meek, and J Weeks (Melbourne: St Hilda's College, University of Melbourne, 1989), 14.

53 WL Mellor, 'Equity and Merit Scholarship Scheme, 1990 Administrative Review', A4250, 1990/1349, NAA, 13.

Australia in 1990. It was undertaken by an external consultant and a review team who travelled to a number of posts.⁵⁴ This was accompanied by an internal review.⁵⁵ These were largely positive, the external review concluding that the 'EMSS has succeeded, and will continue to succeed, because of the commitment of institutions and personnel both in Australia and overseas'.⁵⁶

The EMSS was again reviewed as it was renamed, and slightly redesigned, as the John Crawford Scholarship Scheme in 1993, and again in 1994. The review in 1994 was designed to provide an 'end of program' review, looking at administrative aspects of the program and their implementation as well as the success of students.⁵⁷ It was intended that this review would go towards supporting the new Australian Development Cooperation Scholarship (ADCOS) program, with the 'best' elements of the EMSS being carried forward into the design of the ADCOS.

Scholarship programs by their very nature are difficult to measure. Long-term outcomes cannot be measured for decades after the activity of the scholarship is complete. In the case of the EMSS, which was over sooner than a student could complete an undergraduate degree, it was particularly difficult. This was noted in reviews: 'It remains to be seen what the advantages or disadvantages are of the scheme being so diverse in design'.⁵⁸

The EMSS program had been designed to utilise funding made available by the abolishing of overseas student subsidies, and to cushion the blow of that policy change for Australian universities. In 1992 a new program, utilising many of the same policy and design settings, was introduced. The name change was not the only alteration (and was incidentally very short lived). The John Crawford Scholarship Scheme (JCSS)⁵⁹ was in operation for only a year (1993), and was replaced/renamed with the ADCOS program. At the same time of the change of name, AIDAB made the decision to move the scholarship programs into the bilateral country programs, rather than in its own scholarship-focused area. In addition, the ongoing Sponsored

54 WL Mellor, 'Equity and Merit Scholarship Scheme, 1990 Administrative Review', A4250, 1990/1349, NAA.

55 'Draft Report of the EMSS Review', A4250, 1990/1349, NAA.

56 WL Mellor, 'Equity and Merit Scholarship Scheme, 1990 Administrative Review', A4250, 1990/1349, NAA, 33.

57 'Terms of Reference for an Evaluation of the EMSS and a Review of the Administrative Arrangements of the Australian Development Cooperation Scholarships | 28 July', A4250, 1990/1583, 1994, NAA.

58 'EMSS Progress Report to 31 July 1989', A4250, 1989/792, NAA.

59 John Crawford played an important role in the development of Australia's aid program. His name is now attached to a specific scholarship funded by the Australian Aid program and managed by the Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research (ACIAR).

Training Program (STP) (sometimes known as the Development Training Program (DTP)) was renamed as the Australian Sponsored Training Assistance Scheme (ASTAS), and in-Australia management was merged with ADCOS.⁶⁰

This move represented a shift in thinking within AIDAB, with decisions about the quantum and style of scholarships to be delegated to the country programs, and much of the in-Australia management delegated to AIDAB Regional Offices, rather than within AIDAB Central. Some concerns about this shift remained; AIDAB was keen to retain gender equity across the whole program,⁶¹ which became more difficult with the devolution into country programs. This, however, did allow for country programs that were struggling to achieve gender equity to be 'saved' by the broader program. Officials recommending these changes appear to have accepted that devolution to country programs would lead to 'an increased degree of involvement of recipient country officials in JCSS targeting and selection'.⁶² Given the EMSS's strong position on barring the involvement of recipient governments in selection, this was a significant concession.⁶³ The ministerial submission requesting the administrative changes is blunt: 'we believe that once JCSS is integrated into country programs, recipient officials will put pressure on us to clear scholarships with them'.⁶⁴

There were some positives expected from the move in responsibility. AIDAB staff felt that the change to a more 'country-specific' element within the scholarship would allow for a flexibility in level of study that was not in the original EMSS design. AIDAB described the JCSS as being 'more closely aligned to the development priorities within individual country programs'.⁶⁵ This was a particular issue in the Pacific, where officials expressed concern that there were not enough 'quality' candidates to sustain

60 'Overseas Students Programs – New Arrangements | Ministerial Submission | 19 December', A4250, 1991/2160, 1991, NAA.

61 'Overseas Students Programs – New Arrangements | Ministerial Submission | 19 December', A4250, 1991/2160, 1991, NAA.

62 'Overseas Students Programs – New Arrangements | Ministerial Submission | 19 December', A4250, 1991/2160, 1991, NAA.

63 While the EMSS had been designed to have little to no input from recipient governments, this had not always worked in practice during implementation. The Chinese scheme involved the recipient government (who selected all the students) and some other limited or significant involvement was present in a number of countries.

64 'Overseas Students Programs – New Arrangements | Ministerial Submission | 19 December', A4250, 1991/2160, 1991, NAA.

65 'Aid – John Crawford Scholarship Scheme (JCSS) | Cablegram to All Student Posts | 4 October', A4250, 1991/2160, 1991, NAA.

the scholarship in its designed form, focused as it was on university-level study. The devolution to country programs would allow for a transition to technical and vocational level training where appropriate.⁶⁶

The shift to the JCSS also included another significant amendment to the program: the move to a two-tiered stipend amount where students with accompanying families received a higher rate. This represented another policy change with lasting implications for the access, equity and gender diversity of Australian Government scholarships. This was a policy difference that resonated through subsequent iterations of the scholarship.

As the EMSS transitioned to the JCSS, bureaucrats within AIDAB discussed the geographic spread of the scholarship program. The program had been put in place to soften the blow for many stakeholders following the abolition of the subsidised higher education for overseas students. Malaysia, Hong Kong and Singapore had been included in the EMSS program for this very reason, and as the 'cushion' was to be removed, their inclusion was considered. A working group in 1991 concluded that while Singapore and Hong Kong should be removed from the program, Malaysia was a more complicated prospect, due to some strain on the political relationship. It was noted by the working group that:

Malaysia represents a major supply of 'commercial' scholars to Australian tertiary institutions; we probably need to hold out JCSS scholarships as part of the publicity program for selling Australian education abroad as an 'aid-trade' activity.⁶⁷

These issues were of less concern in the Pacific, with Equity programs dominating. However, as discussed earlier, some Pacific posts such as New Caledonia had instituted a level of income assessment to ensure that students were not 'of means', to ensure that it was Kanak students rather than white students eligible for the scholarships. Despite the concerns of the working group, a decision was made to continue offering the (fee-only) JCSS to Hong Kong and Singapore in the first intake, with a decision on their future to be decided at a later time.⁶⁸

⁶⁶ 'Report of Working Group – JCSS – Integration into Country Programs', A4250, 1991/2160, 1991, NAA.

⁶⁷ 'Report of Working Group – JCSS – Integration into Country Programs', A4250, 1991/2160, 1991, NAA.

⁶⁸ 'Report of Working Group – JCSS – Integration into Country Programs', A4250, 1991/2160, 1991, NAA.

The JCSS was short lived as a name because of a decision to make the programs 'more appropriately reflect the Australian nature of the program'.⁶⁹ Bureaucrats felt that the Australian Development Cooperation Scholarships more clearly labelled it as an Australian program, hence the change to the ADCOS. The first intake of ADCOS students commenced in 1994. The move from JCSS to ADCOS included some administrative amendments, as the scholarships moved more firmly into the bilateral aid programs. But perhaps more important was the shift to more clearly identify the program as an Australian scholarship to allow the Australian Government more easily bask in the reflected glow of the program. In contemporary discussions around international scholarships this is known as the soft power outcomes of scholarship programs.

Concurrent to the design and launch of the EMSS program, a far more specialised and focused scholarship scheme was initiated by the Australian Government. While the focus of much of this book is tertiary-level scholarships, this award offers an interesting case study on the role of Australia's aid program and scholarships offered during an earlier, perhaps more formative period of a young person's life. It also demonstrates, by its very existence, some of the limitations of the education aid delivered in PNG by successive Australian governments up to that point. As part of the Australia–PNG Treaty of Development Cooperation, in 1988 a Secondary School Students' Project (SSSP) was launched. As part of the project, 'academically high achievers who scored A and B grades in Year 10 in PNG high schools were eligible to apply for the scholarship'.⁷⁰ The scholarship involved them travelling to Australia, boarding at an Australian high school, and completing their senior schooling (Years 11 and 12), although many students also needed to repeat Year 10 to achieve the necessary results to continue into Year 11.

This scholarship scheme was framed as necessary because, in part, there was still extremely limited access to secondary schools in PNG. This was despite the presence of a number of universities in PNG in 1988, including the University of PNG. According to education researcher Juliana McLaughlin, most of the secondary schools in PNG:

69 'Terms of Reference for an Evaluation of the EMSS and a Reivew of the Administrative Arrangements of the Australian Development Cooperation Scholarships | 28 July', A4250, 1990/1583, 1994, NAA.

70 Juliana Mohok McLaughlin and Anne Hickling-Hudson, 'Beyond Dependency Theory: A Postcolonial Analysis of Educating Papua New Guinean High School Students in Australian Schools', *Asia Pacific Journal of Education* 25, no. 2 (2005): 196, doi.org/10.1080/02188790500338187.

offered only a Year 7–10 level of education with an approximate enrolment of 33% of primary school graduates. The majority of these left before Year 10, and very few proceeded to higher education.⁷¹

Some of the graduates of the SSSP program had significant difficulties on their arrival in Australia, unsurprising given the education system from which they came. Unmet expectations about adjustment and capacity in many ways mirror the issues faced by students from PNG during the 1960s and 1970s, which were discussed in an earlier part of this book. Research about this program has also demonstrated that students also had significant difficulties on return to PNG. Juliana McLaughlin's research indicated that:

the social identities that they had developed during their three years in Australia were rejected by the PNG communities, thus pressuring returnees to recreate an appropriate identity which supported their acceptance into PNG society.⁷²

This rejection was experienced by returning students at a community level, but also at a systemic level. The existence of the SSSP highlights the failures of Australia's colonial and postcolonial education policies in PNG.

The policy conflicts emerging out of the SSSP are illustrative of broader concerns with Australian international development scholarships during this period. The Hawke Government, through AIDAB, was making decisions about aid delivery that were in many ways divorced from the recipient governments; seeing the aid recipient as the individual rather than the state. This move was linked to broader conversations occurring at the time about the uses and methods of aid. The role of the individual was given priority, a process Corinna Unger describes as a trend to 'redefine the role of the state in the development process'.⁷³ The EMSS was an experiment in redefining the function of the recipient state in scholarship aid. Tupeni Baba was particularly critical of this approach to aid delivery in the Pacific:

It is obvious in my view that the kind of relationship that has been struck is one-sided. It has been devised to meet Australian needs and interests. This type of relationship can be described as paternalism and not partnership.⁷⁴

71 Mohok McLaughlin and Hickling-Hudson, 'Beyond Dependency Theory', 195.

72 Mohok McLaughlin and Hickling-Hudson, 'Beyond Dependency Theory', 197.

73 Corinna R Unger, *International Development: A Postwar History* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2018).

74 Tupeni L Baba, 'Australia's Involvement in Education in the Pacific: Partnership or Patronage?', *Directions: Journal of Educational Studies* 11, no. 2 (1989): 51.

The charge of paternalism was not new, and the alternative that the EMSS represented did little to address the perception, despite the adaptability of the EMSS to specific country needs and conditions.

The EMSS, and the scholarship programs that came after it, represent a significant shift in approach by the Australian Government in the way it managed scholarships to foreign countries. While the outcomes sought by the scholarship program remained the same – development of recipient countries and development of the recipients of scholarships themselves – one of the key elements shifted: selection. In part, this shift reflected technological advancements of the time. Up until the 1980s, the process of accepting, assessing and shortlisting applications would have needed to be conducted by post, a time-consuming activity. Access to computers, and the capacity to transmit data, either via disk or over emerging internet networks, changed the dynamic significantly. Rather than relying on those ‘in-country’ to make the selections, it was possible to move the responsibility to Australia.

AIDAB was also grappling with the significant domestic pressures that equal opportunity legislation caused on internationally focused policies. By bringing selection in-country it was better able to fulfil the obligations of the Hawke Government. The experiment of the EMSS did allow AIDAB to reset scholarship selection to be the responsibility of the donor, but the freedom for students to choose their own courses from the full range on offer was short lived. As discussed in the next chapter, successive scholarship programs moved to a far more instrumentalist approach, with ‘priority areas of study’ identified by recipient governments. Recipient governments also wrested back some of the control of selection, or at least a seat at the scholarship selection table. Development scholarships also became a part of country programs, allowing them to be integrated into broader aid activities within a country.

This chapter has engaged with the design and implementation of a scholarship program that can be seen as a turning point in Australian international development scholarships. The design process involved many departments and bureaucrats, but there is little evidence to suggest that it was undertaken by specialists in scholarship design. Nevertheless, the process involved a significant number of external parties, including the Australian Vice-Chancellors’ Committees, and a growing network of Australians working to educate those within the region about the Australian education sector. These foundations have grown significantly since that time, with the

AVCC International Development Program (IDP) organisation becoming a significant influence on the growth of the Australian international education sector over subsequent decades.

The EMSS represented an attempt by aid bureaucrats to make the management of scholarship selection easier for themselves, failing to recognise the controlling and paternalistic message that decision made. The EMSS also represented an effort to see education as a broader social good, rather than an instrumentalist activity designed to effect 'development'. This view was not shared by partner governments and was also not in line with the broader neoliberal approach to education that the Dawkins Reforms were putting in place.

As the recommendations of both the Jackson and Goldring reports were synthesised, digested and implemented, or ignored and rejected, Australian universities were forced to develop processes for recruiting, engaging with and supporting a changing cohort of international students. The EMSS provided them with a taste for the requirements, and for many institutions these students compensated for the massive drop in numbers of international students following the abolishing of subsidies. AIDAB itself was also able to test itself in its capacity to design and implement a scholarship program, essentially from scratch. Rather than being a tweaked existing program, the EMSS represents a significant break in approach. AIDAB challenged Australian diplomats across the region to have difficult conversations around equity, access, nepotism, and gender equality. It was a bold experiment that helped Australia to meet its own obligations, and it appears that no diplomatic relationships was terminally damaged by the EMSS. It also laid out the framework for each scholarship program that has come since.

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