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## Uncertain decolonisation

The 1950s marked the beginning of what is arguably the most significant, influential international Australian Government scholarship program – the Colombo Plan. Decisions made by the Department of Immigration in 1951 had led to rapid growth in the number of students coming to Australia for study from Asia and the Pacific. However, by the late 1950s and into the 1960s, colonial administrations in the Pacific and Australian representatives who worked in the Pacific were keen for the Menzies Government to expand its scholarships to Pacific Island territories, including Fiji, which was being prepared for independence by the British colonial administration. These agitators were attempting to draw attention to the Pacific as they saw policy focus, and scholarships, being directed towards South and South-East Asia. For these actors a new opportunity came about with the introduction of the Commonwealth Scholarship and Fellowship Plan. This chapter will discuss the emergence of this plan, and the way in which different government departments worked to influence the outcome of discussions at a meeting of Commonwealth nations in the United Kingdom in 1959. Even with this new scholarship, opportunities for students from the Pacific to study in Australia were limited and the focus of policy and decision-makers was not directed towards the Pacific in any sustained manner.

The scholarships that had begun in 1948 as South-East Asian Scholarship Scheme was by then known as the Australian International Awards Scheme. It continued over the decade, bringing students from ‘outside’ the Colombo Plan area into Australian universities. By this time the various uses of scholarships were becoming clear: development, diplomacy, influence and the protection of Australia’s national interests. Each of the scholarships the Australian Government funded served many masters, interpreted differently

by each actor. The success of the Colombo Plan gave politicians and bureaucrats an easy shorthand for the type of program, and success, they wished to see in various areas of Australian engagement, including the Territory of Papua and New Guinea (TPNG). It also provided, as shown in the previous chapter, a program to rail against.

Decolonisation within the British Empire reshaped the relationships between the colonies, former colonies and the metropolitan power of the UK. The Commonwealth of Nations officially came into being in 1949, and the nations that considered themselves part of the Commonwealth declared themselves free and equal members of the organisation. This included Australia, New Zealand, Pakistan, Ceylon (later Sri Lanka), India, Canada, South Africa and, of course, the UK. Education was discussed in various forums of the Commonwealth, but at a conference in Montreal in 1958 it was noted that discussions concerning trade and politics prevented a more comprehensive examination of education across the Commonwealth states. An Australian Government report from the Montreal Conference noted that:

The conference agreed that the expansion of education and training within the Commonwealth is an essential condition of economic development. It was agreed in principle that a new scheme additional to existing programmes of Commonwealth scholarships and fellowships should be established ...<sup>1</sup>

The report went on to explain that the details of the scholarships were to be worked out at a special conference to be held in the UK the following year. Prime Minister Menzies was not entirely comfortable with the way the Commonwealth was evolving.<sup>2</sup> Nevertheless, his department supported this mooted Commonwealth Scholarship Scheme. The Department of External Affairs (DEA) was less convinced. The dispute about where the geographic and political focus of any scholarship program should lie troubled the DEA, which believed that responsibility for allocation of scholarships should lie with the department. It was also aware of the negative connotations that could be implied by a scholarship program centred around the Commonwealth and an older concept of empire including colonies and dependencies yet to be independent. A DEA briefing note included the statement

1 'Cablegram from Montreal Conference Delegation', A1838, 2047/1, 1958, National Archives of Australia (NAA).

2 Chris Waters, 'Macmillan, Menzies, History and Empire', *Australian Historical Studies* 33, no. 119 (2002): 93–107, doi.org/10.1080/10314610208596203.

I think that we should explain to the Prime Minister's [Department] that although we do not want a purely 'Empire' or 'Commonwealth' Scheme, we have been considering granting scholarships to certain underdeveloped British territories that are outside our 'sphere of influence' – such as the British Territories in Africa. And, in order to bring Prime Minister's Department around to our way of thinking, I think we should be prepared to offer scholarships to certain other British territories and countries.<sup>3</sup>

The detail that these reports from the Montreal Conference and its aftermath outline show that the motivations for scholarships to developing countries around the world were not consistent across the Australian Government. Menzies was not happy about the way in which the Commonwealth was evolving, away from the 'Crown Commonwealth' that he was comfortable with and towards what David Goldsworthy describes as a 'nest of republics'.<sup>4</sup> Given, however, the number of British colonies in the Pacific Islands, any Commonwealth scholarship scheme would play some role in the region. The Department of External Affairs was concerned that the involvement of other Commonwealth nations, such as Canada and the UK, offering scholarships to students from the Pacific could dilute Australia's status in its own region. This showed concern, but was not matched by a willingness on the part of the department to dedicate sufficient resources and energy towards relationships with Pacific countries.

It is worth noting at this point that while there is some scholarship about the Commonwealth Scholarship and Fellowship Plan (CSFP), including a history of the plan by Hilary Perraton, much of the investigation of the program is from the perspective of the UK.<sup>5</sup> This is not surprising given the evolution of the scholarship, with the secretariat eventually being established in the UK. However, this does highlight one of the problems raised by Australian and other bureaucrats, about the plan, that is the dominance of the UK in what was intended to be a pan-Commonwealth education cooperation plan.

3 'Briefing Note to Dexter – Prime Minister's Department's Proposals, 6 March 1957', A1838, 2047/1, NAA.

4 David Goldsworthy, 'Australian External Policy and the End of Britain's Empire', *Australian Journal of Politics and History* 51, no. 1 (2005): 17–29, doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-8497.2005.00357.x.

5 Hilary Perraton, *Learning Abroad: A History of the Commonwealth Scholarship and Fellowship Plan*, rev. ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2009).

The CSFP was not only a project of the UK, and the negotiations before and at the Oxford Conference give an insight into the motivations of the various delegations. Delegates from around the Commonwealth were involved in the conferences that decided on the form and purposes of these scholarships. They all brought their own understandings of the purposes and priorities of scholarships to these conferences, their own biases and ideas about regions of focus. It is possible these conferences also provided for a cross-pollination of ideas, where the purposes, priorities and designs of scholarships could be shared.

Australia had its own scholarships to demonstrate expertise in the field: the Australian International Award Scholarships and the Colombo Plan. Many of the developed nations involved had their own programs – for example, the Colonial Development and Welfare Scholarship Scheme was a huge program established by the UK, and all scholarship administrators were watching the progress of the Fulbright Scheme in the United States. It is likely that the sharing of knowledge at these events led to what was to become a ‘standard’ scholarship design that has persisted both in Australia, but also around the world, since this period. As was shown in a previous chapter, the Rhodes Scholarship influenced the Fulbright Scholarships and was almost certainly the basis for the Morris Hedstrom Scholarship in Fiji; forums like the Oxford Conference allowed for further dissemination of ideas and methods.

At the Commonwealth Trade and Economic Conference, held in Montreal in 1958, the Canadian delegation proposed a Commonwealth Scholarship and Fellowship Scheme that would strengthen Commonwealth cooperation, and offer educational development to new and old Commonwealth nations. The proposal was a result of discussions leading up to the Montreal Conference. Australia did not commit to the scholarship program in Montreal, but did agree to attend the planned conference in Oxford the following year.<sup>6</sup> Australia also announced, just prior to the Montreal Conference, an increase in the Australian International Awards, in part to highlight Australia’s efforts in the area of scholarships and education aid.<sup>7</sup> Nevertheless, in the context of the numbers of scholarships that were being discussed at the time, in both the Colombo Plan and the proposed Commonwealth Scholarships, an increase to 12 awards per year

6 ‘Oxford Conference on Education | Cabinet Submission – 3 June 1959’, A463, 1958/4459 Attachment, 1959, NAA.

7 ‘Oxford Conference on Education, Briefing Document’, A463, 1958/4459 Part 2, 1959, NAA.

was but a drop in the ocean. In a draft Cabinet submission on Australia's participation in the Oxford Conference, the author was dismissive of the outcomes of the conference, noting that 'frankly, we thought that the whole thing was put on in an attempt to rescue the Montreal Conference from failure'.<sup>8</sup> Nevertheless, not wishing to be seen as a pariah within the Commonwealth, the Menzies Government committed itself to the concept of education cooperation across the Commonwealth, and the proposed scholarship scheme.<sup>9</sup>

In the lead-up to the conference in Oxford, officials from Australia House in London met regularly with the Commonwealth Relations Office and other Commonwealth nations' representatives to gauge interest, the extent of planning and the membership of delegations to the conference. News of the preparations were reported in the papers, with a small excerpt in Sydney's *Daily Telegraph* in May 1959 listing the leaders of the British Delegation.<sup>10</sup> The subheading of the article, 'Empire Education', likely frustrated the staff at the DEA, who were, as noted earlier, working to distance the Commonwealth Scholarship Scheme from the concept of empire.

Not everyone was excited by the prospect of the Commonwealth Scholarship Scheme. In a candid letter to Prime Minister Menzies, the Treasurer, Harold Holt, wrote that he felt the proposed scheme was not based on any review of the needs across the Commonwealth, and the announcements and discussions in Montreal were 'aimed primarily at making newspaper headlines'.<sup>11</sup> Holt outlined the many ways he felt the Australian Government was already contributing to educational opportunities across the Commonwealth. He was concerned that universities in Australia were already under stress, noting that the University of Melbourne Annual Report had reported a 'critical situation' and the introduction of quotas for university places. His letter provided Menzies with a less than enthusiastic position on the scholarship scheme, but did not call for it to be boycotted all together.

8 'Draft Cabinet Submission – Oxford Conference (1959)', A463, 1958/4459 Part 2, NAA.

9 Perraton has published a more in-depth account of the circumstances leading up to the Montreal Conference and the establishment of the Commonwealth Scholarship and Fellowship Plan. Perraton, *Learning Abroad*.

10 '150 Delegates for Oxford | Empire Education', *Daily Telegraph*, 22 May 1959. The article does not mention Australia's participation in the event.

11 'Letter from Holt to Menzies Re Commonwealth Education Cooperation | 8 April', A463, 1958/4459 Attachment 1959, NAA.

Dr Ronald Mendelsohn, in the Prime Minister's Department, an experienced bureaucrat who wrote extensively on social security and social housing, prepared a brief for the Australian delegation to the conference. He sought advice from others, including the Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation (CSIRO), which supplied Mendelsohn with a detailed account of the organisation's studentship system.<sup>12</sup> Advice was also provided to Mendelsohn from across the government on existing teacher exchange programs, the Colombo Plan and other educational programs that may help to inform and support the delegation in their discussions.<sup>13</sup>

Australian representatives from High Commissions across the Commonwealth wrote with thoughts and news about the participation of Commonwealth nations. These reports, letters and memoranda suggest that Commonwealth nations were speaking across each other, each nation with a different view of what the scholarship scheme was intended to achieve, each with a different view of the size, scope and structure. For example, a memorandum from Canada was titled *Oxford Conference on Commonwealth Education Co-operation* whereas from India a letter is titled *Oxford Conference on Commonwealth Technical Co-operation*.<sup>14</sup> These subtle but important differences highlight the differing expectations of participating nations. It is also possible to see the influence of the Colombo Plan on discourse around scholarships, with India – a donor and recipient in the Colombo Plan – viewing the potential of the Commonwealth plan in a similar frame.

A significant paper prepared for Canadian university representatives was obtained by the Department of External Affairs and forwarded to the Prime Minister's Department. The document went into great detail about the origins of the concept at the Commonwealth Trade and Economic Conference in Montreal in 1958. The Canadian Government had broad ambitions for the scheme, proposing scholarship committees operating in all independent Commonwealth countries, with awards to be split across

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12 Guy B Gresford, 'Notes on CSIRO Studentships | 17/06/1959', A463, 1958/4459 Part 2, 1959, NAA.

13 'Oxford Conference on Education', A463, 1958/4459 Part 2, 1959, NAA.

14 'Oxford Conference on Commonwealth Educational Co-Operation | Memorandum from HC Ottawa | 21 April 1959', A463, 1958/4459 Part 2, 1959, NAA; and D Dexter, 'Oxford Conference on Commonwealth Technical Co-Operation | Letter from HC New Delhi to DEA | 25 April 1959', A463, 1958/4459 Part 2, 1959, NAA.

the ‘Old Commonwealth’ (one quarter), ‘New Commonwealth’ including Nigeria and the West Indies (one half) and the final quarter to colonial and trust territories.<sup>15</sup>

The New Zealand Government was aware of the Canadian position, as well as those of the UK and Australian delegations. Like Australia, the New Zealand Government was concerned about the way the proposed scheme would interact with the Colombo Plan. The Department of External Affairs (NZ) wrote in its submission to the prime minister that it remained concerned about the capacity of the education system to cope with the influx of Colombo Plan students, let alone with additional sponsored students. The department was concerned that ‘the influx of overseas students, particularly those at the undergraduate level, has accentuated existing shortages of classrooms, living accommodation and qualified teaching staff’.<sup>16</sup> It was equally worried about the focus on university education that was implicit in the UK proposals being discussed. Like the Australian Department of External Affairs, its New Zealand counterpart was concerned that the new scheme worked to encourage engagement across the Commonwealth (new and old), and noted that the UK proposal ‘would simply re-emphasise traditional dependence on the UK for higher educational opportunities rather than foster an interchange of skills and experience amongst the Commonwealth countries as a whole’.<sup>17</sup> This distancing by New Zealand from traditional conceptions of empire – the hub and spoke model that had persisted since European settlement – is notable. The New Zealand submission instead advocated a broader conception of the scheme, including professional exchanges, ‘with the objective of securing the widest possible sharing of Commonwealth knowledge and techniques on a reciprocal and cooperative basis’.<sup>18</sup>

The UK Government took a leadership role from the outset. By June 1959 it had prepared a proposal that envisaged a £10 million fund over five years to support educational assistance across the Commonwealth. This proposal included a £6 million contribution from the UK, with

15 ‘Commonwealth Scholarship Scheme | Confidential Briefing | Canada | 8 April’, A463, 1958/4459 Part 2, 1959, NAA.

16 ‘Commonwealth Education Conference | New Zealand Submission | June 1959’, A463, 1958/4459 Part 2, 1959, NAA.

17 ‘Commonwealth Education Conference | New Zealand Submission | June 1959’, A463, 1958/4459 Part 2, 1959, NAA.

18 ‘Commonwealth Education Conference | New Zealand Submission | June 1959’, A463, 1958/4459 Part 2, 1959, NAA.

the remaining £4 million to come from ‘appropriate contributions’ from other Commonwealth countries.<sup>19</sup> The UK was also providing the bulk of scholarships (500 awards at any one time), and also offering to make 500 additional teacher training places available at UK teacher training institutions for Commonwealth students.<sup>20</sup> Proposals such as these contributed to the reticence of New Zealand to accept the dominance of the UK in the program – encouraging more Commonwealth students to study in the UK rather than flows of students across the Commonwealth.

The UK Government tightly controlled the agenda of the conference. Australia’s delegation head, Sir Allen Brown (the Deputy Australian High Commissioner who had served as the Secretary of the Prime Minister’s Department before being appointed to London), noted in a letter to the Prime Minister’s Department that he suspected the UK were ‘specifically avoiding’ general discussions about the broad principles of Commonwealth education.<sup>21</sup> This allowed for focus to remain on tertiary-level scholarships, rather than other complicated issues that were being by experienced by education departments around the Commonwealth.

Brown also noted concerns that the Australian delegation couldn’t speak about teacher supply issues, given this was a responsibility of state governments. This was an even more significant issue for the Canadian delegation, because higher education was funded and managed through the provinces, meaning the Canadian federal government was allocating funds for the scholarship program within a system they otherwise did not fund directly.

The Colombo Plan remained front of mind as the Australian Government discussed its participation in the proposed new scheme: ‘it can be thought of as an extension of the Colombo Plan to the whole Commonwealth’<sup>22</sup> noted one draft Cabinet submission. A briefing report prepared in May 1959 by the Commonwealth Office of Education (COE) noted Australia’s contribution to the Colombo Plan: ‘Australia’s contribution to training under the Colombo Plan has been considerable. In absolute terms it has

19 ‘Commonwealth Education Conference – United Kingdom Proposals | Commonwealth Relations Office | 11 June 1959’, A463, 1958/4459 Part 3, 1959, NAA.

20 ‘Commonwealth Education Conference – United Kingdom Proposals | Commonwealth Relations Office | 11 June 1959’, A463, 1958/4459 Part 3, 1959, NAA.

21 Allen Brown, ‘Letter Regarding Oxford Conference Preparations | 24 June’, A463 1958/4459 Part 3, 1959, NAA.

22 ‘Draft Cabinet Submission – Oxford Conference (1959)’, A463, 1958/4459 Part 2, NAA.



been greater than that of the UK and far greater than that of Canada'.<sup>23</sup> This was part of a broader goal of highlighting Australia's contribution to the Commonwealth at the Oxford Conference.

Discussions and briefings in the Department of External Affairs and the COE addressed the perception that the Commonwealth Scholarship program had the potential to open up a scholarship program to the humanities and social sciences, areas of study that were not available in the Colombo Plan. A briefing note highlighted that the scheme will 'supplement the Colombo Plan in the countries concerned and would be wider in range, since it includes provision for scholarships not directly concerned with economic development'.<sup>24</sup> The possibility of opening up Australian scholarships to non-technical fields was not just about diversifying the overseas student body:

Students in non-technical fields may often have greater potential political influence than technical trainees and there could be definite advantages in giving members of the new Commonwealth countries whether in Asia or Africa, whose background is in fields such as law, political science and the humanities, some direct experience of the working of Australian institutions and of Australian democratic practices.<sup>25</sup>

The same briefing noted that half the Colombo Plan awards had been provided to Commonwealth countries in South and South-East Asia. This demonstrated a concern that a balance had to be found between the Colombo Plan and the Commonwealth Scholarships. Thoughts of reducing the number of Colombo Awards to Commonwealth countries, in line with the number of Commonwealth Scholarships, was considered, but rejected as the government felt that it would 'leave us open to criticism within the Colombo Plan region and also within countries of the Commonwealth'.<sup>26</sup>

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23 'Oxford Conference on Education | Commonwealth Office of Education | 25 May 1959', A463, 1958/4459 Part 2, 1959, NAA. That Australia has contributed significantly to the development of the Commonwealth via the Colombo Plan is noted in many of the documents prepared in advance of the Oxford Conference. There is a sense that the authors of these reports feel that Australia's contribution has not been sufficiently recognised by Canada and the UK.

24 'Oxford Conference on Education, Briefing Document', A463, 1958/4459 Part 2, 1959, NAA.

25 'Oxford Conference on Education, Briefing Document', A463, 1958/4459 Part 2, 1959, NAA.

26 'Oxford Conference on Education, Briefing Document', A463, 1958/4459 Part 2, 1959, NAA.

The Menzies Government's desire to clearly demarcate between the new Commonwealth scheme and the existing Colombo Plan scheme was not unique. The Indian Government was also concerned about the distinction between the two, not only because of administrative arrangements but also because of funding. David Dexter, who was at the time Counsellor at the Australian High Commission in New Delhi and who was soon to be appointed secretary of the Australian Universities Commission, noted in late April 1959 that India was:

seeking clarification from the UK about the demarcation between the Colombo Plan and the proposed new Commonwealth scheme ... . The Indians are ... trying to ascertain whether the United Kingdom intend to finance the new scheme from their promised lift in technical assistance under the Colombo Plan.<sup>27</sup>

In the final briefing for the Australian delegation, delegates were asked to 'ensure that adequate recognition is given to our Colombo Plan activities'.<sup>28</sup> The Australian Government was determined that Australia's position in the Commonwealth as part of the 'old' Commonwealth was to be recognised.

There is an undertone in much of the preparatory documentation for the conference, both the Australian and some of those prepared by other Commonwealth nations, that the scholarship program was not going to live up to the overseas development potential that had been envisaged at Montreal. This is in part because of the role already being played by the Colombo Plan. UK Secretary of State for Commonwealth Relations, Lord Home, noted in a letter to Menzies that the scholarship scheme 'will tend to help the older Commonwealth countries proportionately more than the others'.<sup>29</sup> Lord Home goes on to explain that the proposed teacher training support would be of greater benefit to the newer Commonwealth countries and colonial territories, and this was more 'in line with the Montreal philosophy'.<sup>30</sup>

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27 D Dexter, 'Oxford Conference on Commonwealth Technical Co-Operation | Letter from HC New Dehli to DEA | 25 April 1959', A463, 1958/4459 Part 2, 1959, NAA.

28 'Australian Participation in the Scheme of Commonwealth Co-Operation in Education | Delegation Brief', A463, 1958/4459 Part 3, 1959, NAA.

29 'Letter to Robert Menzies Re Commonwealth Education Conference | 10 July', A463, 1958/4459 Part 3, 1959, NAA.

30 'Letter to Robert Menzies Re Commonwealth Education Conference | 10 July', A463, 1958/4459 Part 3, 1959, NAA.

Preparations for the conference were made largely without the input of Menzies, who was overseas at the time of the lead-up to the conference. A Cabinet submission signed by John McEwen as acting prime minister in June 1959, prior to the conference, provides insight into the thinking of the government. He noted that the decision not to commit in Montreal in 1958 was based on a wariness to participate in a scheme – given Australia was already substantially financially invested in the Colombo Plan – and there was a risk that it ‘might strain both our financial resources and our capacity to train more people’.<sup>31</sup> However, McEwen noted that by 1959 the situation was different. Once again, the Colombo Plan loomed large in the thoughts of policymakers. McEwen wrote that the new program could be thought of as ‘an extension of the Colombo Plan to the whole Commonwealth’.<sup>32</sup> This realigning of the scholarship within the parameters of the familiar Colombo Plan was also paired with an understanding that the scheme had been developed by the UK and Canada, and not participating ‘could have bad effects on our own prestige’.<sup>33</sup> McEwen framed the potential of the new Commonwealth Scholarship as an opportunity to connect with old ‘friends’ Canada, New Zealand and South Africa, while limiting aid to developing countries through the Colombo Plan. McEwen was savvy enough to know that this approach should not be publicised, lest it be poorly received in the developing world, in particular what he termed ‘new Commonwealth members’.<sup>34</sup> But McEwen’s thoughts provided an insight into the way in which the Colombo Plan was part of the structure of Australian aid. Rather than, in McEwen’s mind, an opportunity to expand Australia’s aid, the Colombo Plan gave the government a frame within which they could limit Australia’s aid. If the government could point to the Colombo Plan, which was popular, they had less of an obligation to do anything more.

The briefing prepared for the delegation prior to the conference provided a more settled guide to the thinking of the Australian Government, with instructions for delegates to speak to other delegations to determine where Australia’s contribution could best be made. The government had created

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31 ‘Oxford Conference on Education | Cabinet Submission – 3 June 1959’, A463, 1958/4459 Attachment, 1959, NAA.

32 ‘Oxford Conference on Education | Cabinet Submission – 3 June 1959’, A463, 1958/4459 Attachment, 1959, NAA.

33 ‘Oxford Conference on Education | Cabinet Submission – 3 June 1959’, A463, 1958/4459 Attachment, 1959, NAA.

34 McEwen also notes that the scholarship scheme is likely to entitle Australia to up to 20 awards from what he terms ‘Old Commonwealth countries’. ‘Oxford Conference on Education | Cabinet Submission – 3 June 1959’, A463, 1958/4459 Attachment, 1959, NAA.

for its delegation the difficult task of supporting the scholarship plan, but trying to avoid the sole focus being newer Commonwealth members, while not allowing countries to get ‘the impression that Australia’s contribution to the scheme of awards discriminates against the undeveloped countries of the Commonwealth’.<sup>35</sup> This impression would be difficult to avoid, given the proposed allocation of 50 scholarships, provided as an illustration in the delegation briefing. This allocated 12 awards to the UK, 10 to Canada, seven to South Africa and four to New Zealand. Five awards were to be allocated to Colombo Plan countries, and only 12 awards were ‘allocated’ to be shared between ‘Commonwealth countries and dependencies in Africa, the West Indies and the Pacific’.<sup>36</sup> The geographic focus put into the briefing by the Prime Minister’s Department was not necessarily supported by the Department of External Affairs, which suggested the briefing be changed given the lack of ‘political interest’ in the West Indies. The Department of External Affairs was also concerned that Colombo Plan nations were not disadvantaged in the new scheme, suggesting a more nuanced wording allowing scholarships to be provided to Colombo Plan nations.<sup>37</sup>

The Prime Minister’s Department briefing envisaged the scheme operating in a similar manner to the Colombo Plan – a series of bilateral arrangements under the umbrella of one scheme. The briefing for delegates noted that the administration of the scheme at the Australian end could be facilitated with little additional staffing – a benefit of the infrastructure put in place for the placement and support of Colombo Plan students over the preceding decade.

The Australian delegation represented a variety of interested parties. A portion of the delegation was made up of representatives from Australia House, Australia’s High Commission in London. Mendelsohn represented the Prime Minister’s Department and JJ Pratt was the COE representative. The vice-chancellors of the Universities of New England and Adelaide represented the university sector, with directors of education from New South Wales and Tasmania rounding out the ‘educationalist’ portion of the

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35 ‘Australian Participation in the Scheme of Commonwealth Co-Operation in Education | Delegation Brief’, A463, 1958/4459 Part 3, 1959, NAA.

36 ‘Australian Participation in the Scheme of Commonwealth Co-Operation in Education | Delegation Brief’, A463, 1958/4459 Part 3, 1959, NAA.

37 ‘Oxford Conference on Education | Letter from DEA to PMD | 24 June 1959’, A463, 1958/4459 Part 3, 1959, NAA. Despite this request, the final briefing provided to the delegation included reference to the West Indies.

delegation.<sup>38</sup> Sir Allen Brown, the Deputy High Commissioner for Australia in the UK, led the delegation, which by mid-June was still being arranged. There was a desire to have a departmental representative from Treasury take part in the delegation,<sup>39</sup> reflecting the understanding that any financial commitment for the scholarship program was going to require Treasury approval, and including them in the decision-making process would make these approvals more likely.

Every member country of the Commonwealth attended the Oxford Conference in 1959, with colonial territories being represented by what was described by H Lionel Elvin as a 'wing of the United Kingdom delegation'.<sup>40</sup> In Elvin's contemporaneous account of the conference, the number of attendees was framed positively; *all* independent nations attended. However, in an article from 2009 by Malcolm Skilbeck and Helen Connell this is described as *only* 10 nations attending,<sup>41</sup> perhaps failing to note the greater context of decolonisation in which the conference was taking place. The *Commonwealth Survey* report of the conference noted the attendees as being:

the United Kingdom, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, India, Pakistan, Ceylon, Ghana, the Federation of Malaya, and the Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland. The following United Kingdom dependencies were represented in an advisory capacity to the United Kingdom delegation – Aden, British Guiana, British Honduras, Fiji and the West Pacific, Hong Kong, Kenya, Malta, Mauritius, Nigeria, North Borneo and Sarawak, Sierra Leone and the Gambia, Somaliland Protectorate, Tanganyika, Uganda, The West Indies and Zanzibar.<sup>42</sup>

While some of the nations represented at the Oxford Conference were the same as those who had been at the table at the beginning of the Colombo Plan 10 years earlier, the group was now much larger and included both newly

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38 While the Vice-Chancellor of the University of New England was to participate as part of the delegation, government representatives were keen to 'steer him away from any real work', suspecting he may prove a problem. 'Australian Delegation List | Letter to Australian High Commission', A463, 1958, 4459 Part 3, 1959, NAA.

39 'Australian Delegation List | Letter to Australian High Commission', A463, 1958, 4459 Part 3, 1959, NAA.

40 H Lionel Elvin, 'First Commonwealth Education Conference Oxford, July, 1959', *International Review of Education* 6, no. 1 (1960): 79, doi.org/10.1007/BF01416669.

41 Malcolm Skilbeck and Helen Connell, 'Commonwealth Education in its Changing International Setting', *The Round Table* 98, no. 405 (2009): 690, doi.org/10.1080/00358530903371395.

42 'Commonwealth Survey, Volume 5, No. 17 (Central Office of Information)', A463, 1958/4459 Part 4, 1959, NAA. In 1959 members of the Commonwealth were Canada, Ghana, India, Malaysia, New Zealand, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, the UK and Australia.

independent nations, such as Ghana, and dependencies from across the globe. Conflicts and confrontations formed the backdrop of the conference, as the Commonwealth Relations Office took on the mantle being handed to it by the Colonial Office, and the UK attempted to negotiate where it might fit in this new Commonwealth of Nations, while remaining a colonial power in areas of the world such as the Pacific and much of Africa. In his history of the CSFP, *Learning Abroad*, Hilary Perraton describes the period as the ‘afterglow of empire and at the dawn of the new Commonwealth’.<sup>43</sup>

In John Lee’s analysis of the papers of the chair of the conference, Vice-Chancellor of the University of Bristol Sir Philip Morris, he noted that ‘there were strong hints about the Commonwealth as an expression of the civilisation that could counter the influence of Soviet communism’.<sup>44</sup> The effort to develop a sense of the Commonwealth as a group was also encouraged through inspirational speeches. A speech given by the conference president and Chancellor of Oxford, the Earl of Halifax, was theatrical (and somewhat ahistorical) with his characterisation of the Commonwealth organisation as:

The co-operative spirit of this association, forged in the search for freedom, and burnished in its defence, that gives a special sense of dedication and inspiration to Commonwealth Conferences such as this.<sup>45</sup>

He was equally effusive in his description of the problems to be addressed by education: ‘Freedom itself will depend on the education we are providing now for our young people’.<sup>46</sup> Lord Home, Secretary of State for Commonwealth Relations, was also keen to stress the commonalities of the Commonwealth, noting that the members shared ‘literary traditions together with habits of thought and outlook which are remarkably similar’.<sup>47</sup> This determination to create a positive sense of common history, while not mentioning the empire that had created it, was reminiscent of the DEA efforts to keep the concept of empire out of conversations about scholarships.

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43 Perraton, *Learning Abroad*, 1.

44 John Michael Lee, ‘On Reading the Morris Papers: 1959 Revisited’, *Round Table* 98, no. 405 (2009): 775, doi.org/10.1080/00358530903371445.

45 ‘News from Britain – Commonwealth Education Conference | UK Information Service (UK High Commission in Australia) | 16 July’, A463, 1958/4459 Part 3, 1959, NAA.

46 ‘News from Britain – Commonwealth Education Conference | UK Information Service (UK High Commission in Australia) | 16 July’, A463, 1958/4459 Part 3, 1959, NAA.

47 ‘News from Britain – Commonwealth Education Conference | UK Information Service (UK High Commission in Australia) | 17 July’, A463, 1958/4459 Part 3, 1959, NAA.

There was recognition, however, that despite their shared history, the nations of the Commonwealth were not the same. H Lionel Elvin's report of the conference noted that the event highlighted the differences across the nations of the Commonwealth, especially 'the difficulties of low-income countries anxious to extend and improve their systems of education'.<sup>48</sup> The inequity was also noted by Philip Morris, who:

went into the Oxford Conference with a strong sense of the inequalities to be found across the Commonwealth ... with ... an awareness of the vulnerability of new states emerging from decolonisation.<sup>49</sup>

This awareness of the uneven nature of the nations of the Commonwealth aligned with discussions that had been occurring within the DEA, particularly in relation to support for Ghana, and other British colonies expecting to be declaring independence within the coming years.

While delegates were met with a firm framework in relation to the proposed scholarship scheme, there was room for negotiation about what the final scheme would look like. Australia, as discussed, had gone in burnishing its own scholarship credentials, as had other nations such as the UK. The Colonial Development and Welfare Scheme put in place prior to the Second World War was winding down, after a massive investment over the previous decade. Given this, Allen Brown, the Australian delegation head, wrote in a briefing to DEA that:

the Committee was firmly convinced of the need to establish clearly that the Commonwealth Scholarship was additional to, and distinct from, all existing schemes in the field of training and assistance.<sup>50</sup>

In short, this scheme could not be rolled into or double counted along with other schemes being offered by participant nations.

Just prior to the completion of the conference, Brown wrote to the Prime Minister's Department that Australia had offered 100 scholarships. A press remark noted that the scheme was to be 'a most significant experiment in Commonwealth partnership'.<sup>51</sup> In the end, the commitment of numbers

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48 Elvin, 'First Commonwealth Education Conference', 79.

49 Lee, 'On Reading the Morris Papers', 773.

50 Allen Brown, 'Report from Commonwealth Education Conference | Cablegram | 24 July', A463, 1958/4459 Part 3, 1959, NAA.

51 'Report from Commonwealth Education Conference | Cablegram | 29 July', A463, 1958/4459 Part 3, 1959, NAA.

was as expected prior to the conference, with the UK contributing 500 scholarships, Canada 250, India 100 (the same as Australia), New Zealand 50 and other nations contributing a small number of scholarships, among them newly independent nation Ghana.<sup>52</sup> Brown's message to the press expounded the success of the conference and noted the potential that education offered for Commonwealth cooperation. This message of the momentous role that education could play for the nations of the Commonwealth was encouraged during the conference.

Elvin's report provided a positive view of the conference and the outcomes to emerge from it, and indicated a feeling at the time that mobility across the Commonwealth might create possibilities for training and education for all members. Other evidence suggested tension was ever present. Morris's papers noted that 'Ghana, for instance, wanted to create Commonwealth scholarships for only its own students in its own colleges',<sup>53</sup> while others preferred a regional approach. In the briefings that Philip Morris received from British civil servants, the future of education collaboration was seen along:

radial terms – lines reaching out from the mother country to the self-governing dominions – even if they did not have the details to hand, without a proper knowledge of some of the principle cross-cutting links.<sup>54</sup>

The imperial mindset, as feared by New Zealand, persisted in the minds of some of these civil servants.

The Australian delegation's reports from the conference judged the event a success, with Australia making the expected commitment of scholarships, and not being overly drawn on other points of cooperation, such as teacher training.<sup>55</sup> One early briefing prepared by the COE concluded with a qualification-filled sentence highlighting Australia's confused position:

I believe our strong delegation may have enabled us and the Canadians to have ... indicated, without unduly committing us, that we are able and willing to make a definite, if limited, contribution to Commonwealth development.<sup>56</sup>

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52 Elvin, 'First Commonwealth Education Conference', 80.

53 Lee, 'On Reading the Morris Papers', 774.

54 Lee, 'On Reading the Morris Papers', 771–72.

55 'Report from Commonwealth Education Conference | Cablegram | 29 July', A463, 1958/4459 Part 3, 1959, NAA.

56 'Brief Note on Oxford Conference | W.J. Weeden | 29 July', A463, 1958/4459 Part 3, 1959, NAA.



What these records reveal is the confused nature of the inception of the Commonwealth Scholarship and Fellowship Plan. The plan was a development scholarship for some nations, a scholarship to promote exchange across the 'old' Commonwealth for others and an opportunity for technical training for yet others. The failure to settle on this point at the conference allowed for these different understandings to persist once the scholarship scheme was in action. Harold Holt identified this in his letter to Prime Minister Menzies, noting that the scheme had been created without an understanding of what the needs were across the Commonwealth. In many nations, Holt observed, the need for postgraduate scholarships was low, but the need for primary education was significant.<sup>57</sup> A survey of participating states was an attempt to understand the needs, but it did not necessarily translate into appropriate scholarships. In a note provided to the Australian National University professor of history, Keith Hancock, William Weeden wrote that it was expected that Australia would offer 50 scholarships in the first year (50 less than the 100 announced), and it had been invited by a number of states, including the UK, Canada, Malaya and East Africa, to submit applications. Unsurprisingly, nominations were only submitted for the UK and Canada,<sup>58</sup> highlighting the radial terms expected by more cynical bureaucrats. The Australian position was also confused by the Colombo Plan, which had emerged from a largely Commonwealth arrangement, and was very much focused on economic and technical development in the developing nations of South and South-East Asia. To have a significant new scholarship scheme enter into the region had the potential to confuse students and administrators.

In the colonial outposts, news of the outcomes of the Oxford Conference travelled fast. Sir John Gutch, the High Commissioner of the Western Pacific, wrote to the UK's High Commissioner in Australia to note that Australia had committed to 100 scholarships under the Commonwealth scheme. He wrote:

The three Western Pacific High Commission territories – the Gilbert and Ellice Islands Colony, the British Solomon Islands Protectorate and the New Hebrides – will, in the years ahead, be in increasing need of assistance of this kind.<sup>59</sup>

57 Harold Holt, 'Letter to the Prime Minister | 8 April 1959', A463, 1958/4459 Attachment, NAA.

58 William Weeden, 'Notes from Commonwealth Oxford Conference', A3211, 1960/2725 1960, NAA.

59 'Commonwealth Education Conference, Sir J Gutch Letter', A463, 1965/2353, 1960, NAA.

This assumption that Australia would have scholarships to scatter across the Pacific was something the Director of the Office of Education in Sydney was well aware of. William Weeden noted in a conversation with officials from the Pacific (representing colonial administrations) that while Australia had 50 scholarships to award under the Commonwealth scheme, there 'would clearly be a very limited number for the Pacific'.<sup>60</sup> Weeden was at pains to downplay expectations about what Australia could offer and highlight the level of difficulty that managing a scholarship program could represent. He noted the difficulty in managing 'school boys', especially during the school holidays, and was of the belief that there would be few eligible candidates for university studies in the Pacific territories: 'most of their needs would be for training in Technical Colleges and Teachers' Colleges'.<sup>61</sup> The message regarding the scarcity of scholarships for the Pacific was received by the Governor of Fiji at least; the Governor's deputy wrote in a letter to the Australian Department of External Affairs that: 'I am glad to note that two of the fifty scholarships to be awarded this year will be in respect of the Pacific area'.<sup>62</sup> His letter also noted the continuation of the Australian International Awards Scheme, which, while a very small program with 12 awards in 1958/59,<sup>63</sup> remained fixed in the minds of Pacific Administrators. In this way, Weeden, as a scholarship administrator faced a similar problem to that of his contemporaries managing the embryonic Fulbright Scholarship program: balancing the political and educational elements of the scholarships.<sup>64</sup>

These concurrently developing and expanding scholarship programs, the Australian International Awards Scheme, the Commonwealth Scholarships and Fellowships Program and the Colombo Plan, highlighted overlaps and confusion within the Australian bureaucracy. The Department of External Affairs was disappointed to be left out of conversations about the emerging

60 'Commonwealth Office of Education Minute (12 May 1960)', A1361, 53/20/1 Part 1, 1960, NAA.

61 'Commonwealth Office of Education Minute (12 May 1960)', A1361, 53/20/1 Part 1, 1960, NAA.

62 'Commonwealth Scholarship Scheme (Letter from Fiji Deputy Gov. To Dea)', A1361, 53/20/1 Part 1, 1960, NAA.

63 'Letter from Prime Minister's Department to Department of External Affairs, 12 Sept 1958', A1838, 2047/1, NAA.

64 Alice Garner and Diane Kirkby note in their history of the Australian Fulbright Program that 'managing the tension between adherence to government-imposed policy and funding, and avoidance of becoming simply an instrument of government, was a constant challenge for program administrators'. Alice Garner and Diane Kirkby, *Academic Ambassadors, Pacific Allies: Australia, America and the Fulbright Program* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2019), 88, doi.org/10.7228/manchester/9781526128973.001.0001.

Commonwealth plans, which took place within the Prime Minister's Department and the COE. The COE was exasperated with scholarships being requested outside normal nomination processes.

Following the Oxford Conference, the Commonwealth Scholarship and Fellowship Scheme (CSFP) became a feature of Australia's scholarship suite, although as with the Australian International Awards Scheme, it did not involve large numbers of students coming from the Pacific to study in Australia. In 1961 the COE reported that four CSFP awardees from the Pacific were in Australia – two from Fiji, one from Western Samoa and one from the British Solomon Islands.<sup>65</sup> In the 1966 annual report the numbers showed a slight increase, with nine Pacific awardees, four from the Western Pacific, and three from Tonga.<sup>66</sup> Nearly all of these students were undergraduates, while most other CSFP awardees in Australia were postgraduates. The awards provided the DEA and the COE an opportunity to allocate scholarships to nations that were outside the Colombo Plan area, and offer scholarships for areas of study not supported through the Colombo Plan, although each department and office maintained its position regarding the countries to which scholarships should be offered, the ideal type of candidates and how the programs should be administered.

Given the influence of the Colombo Plan concept on policymakers, politicians and the general public during this period, it was not surprising that consideration was given to using the format in other regions. In 1961 the Minister for Territories, Paul Hasluck, received a letter from Dr Harold Wood,<sup>67</sup> the Acting President-General of the Methodist Church of Australia. Wood suggested that the Australian Government should put in place a Pacific Islands Plan, similar to the Colombo Plan.<sup>68</sup> Hasluck forwarded this letter to the prime minister, suggesting that the Department of Territories and the DEA work together to develop a paper to propose a Colombo Plan in the Pacific. The proposal suggested that the South Pacific Commission could be reoriented to manage aid in a manner similar to the Colombo Plan Consultative Committee. The rationale for the proposal was simple:

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65 *Commonwealth Office of Education Annual Report for 1961* (Canberra: Government of the Commonwealth of Australia, 1962).

66 *Commonwealth Office of Education Annual Report for 1966* (Canberra: Government of the Commonwealth of Australia, 1967).

67 Dr Wood noted in his letter that he had also been a missionary in Tonga.

68 'Correspondence Relating to Pacific Islands Plan', A452 1960/5670, 1961, NAA.

As the territories in the region develop – and to assist in that development – there will be an increasing need for the training of men and women from the region in technical and professional skills and an increasing demand for technical assistance.<sup>69</sup>

The proposal was considered by the secretaries of the DEA and the Department of Territories, but in August 1961 the Assistant Secretary of the DEA, David McNicol, wrote to his counterpart at the Department of Territories, Dudley McCarthy, to temper expectations around the plan. He articulated a number of points to explain why the proposal was problematic, not least that it ‘would have a rough passage in Cabinet’.<sup>70</sup> McNicol pointed out that Australia’s own colonial obligations in TPNG required significant investments, and offering aid to other colonies was not politically advisable. This situation provides a useful example of an occasion where the Australian Government’s obligations in Papua and New Guinea took focus and potential funding away from other Pacific territories.

McNicol also noted that Cabinet was likely to ask if this would, in effect, lead to other nations offering aid to New Guinea (Australia’s territory). This is a crucial question, and one that began to occupy the minds of those within the Australian bureaucracy as the obligations of trusteeship to prepare Papua and New Guinea for self-government became more pressing. So, despite encouragement from Hasluck to consider the plan, the Pacific version of the Colombo Plan never got past the proposal stage.

Nevertheless, that the concept was put forward demonstrated, once again, that the Colombo Plan provided a frame through which those interested in aid and development could suggest aid expansion. Conversely, it was also a way in which politicians, such as McEwan, could limit aid to the boundaries provided by the Colombo Plan.

By 1967 the limitations that Australia was placing on its support for the Pacific, notwithstanding the scholarships on offer through the CSFP and the Australian International Awards Scheme, were angering some in the region. An editorial in the *Fiji Times* in July 1967 was scathing of the ‘apparent indifference of official Australia to the Colony’s condition’.<sup>71</sup> The editors noted that Britain was at the other end of the world, and dealing

69 ‘Draft Pacific Islands Plan Paper’, A452 1960/5670, 1961, NAA.

70 ‘Letter from McNicol (DEA) to McCarthy (DOT) Re Pacific Plan | 10 August’, A452 1960/5670, 1961, NAA.

71 ‘Official Australia and Fiji’, *The Fiji Times*, 17 July 1967, 2.

with requests for assistance from all corners of the former British Empire, whereas Australia was but four hours away by plane. The editorial ended with a threat that further indifference could ensure that 'steps may be taken, or contemplated, which will hurt Australian interests in the fields of commerce and finance'.<sup>72</sup> The editors of the *Fiji Times* were clearly dissatisfied with the Australian Government, especially given the perception that Australian businesses were very happy to invest in the colony. In some quarters Australia was perceived to be only taking from the Pacific, exploiting financial and business opportunities without commensurate support for the development of Fiji, or as the *Fiji Times* noted: 'Australia's responsibilities and obligations in the South Pacific.'<sup>73</sup>

This chapter, covering the end of the 1950s and into the 1960s, has considered the role of the Commonwealth of Nations, internal disputes within the Australian Government and bureaucracy about the purpose and role of scholarships, and the development of a university in Papua New Guinea (PNG). The creation of the University of Papua New Guinea went against all previous activities of the Australian Administration in the territory, which had stymied and made difficult access to higher education for most. The decade was also one in which many nations of the South Pacific moved towards independence, with Nauru's independence in 1968 marking the first new Pacific nation. The Australian Government was concerned with developments towards decolonisation in the Pacific in the 1960s. Historian Chris Waters explained the desire of the Australian Government (along with the governments of New Zealand and the USA) to mould decolonisation in a way that allowed for continued influence.<sup>74</sup>

The period also highlighted division within the Australian bureaucracy, particularly between DEA, which saw decolonisation as an important issue Australia needed to be addressing as part of its diplomatic and policy approaches, and the Prime Minister's Department. DEA staff were keen for Australia to support newly independent states such as Ghana, while the Prime Minister's Department and COE were wedded to the idea of keeping a scholarship bound within the loosening ribbons of empire. The compromise achieved, an increase in the numbers of Australian International

72 'Official Australia and Fiji', *The Fiji Times*, 17 July 1967, 2.

73 'Official Australia and Fiji', *The Fiji Times*, 17 July 1967, 2.

74 Chris Waters, 'Official Influence in the Making of Foreign Policy: The Washington Study Group on the South Pacific, 1962', in *Australia Goes to Washington: 75 Years of Australian Representation in the United States, 1940–2015*, ed. David Lowe, David Lee and Carl Bridge, 105–22 (Canberra: ANU Press, 2016), 109, doi.org/10.22459/AGTW.12.2016.06.

Awards Scheme, allowed the Prime Minister's Department to trumpet the generosity of Australia at the Montreal Commonwealth Conference in 1958. Australia's participation in the Oxford Commonwealth Education conference of 1959 then led to its inclusion in the CSFP, a program that not only allowed students from developing nations to study in Australia, but also supported Australian students to study across the Commonwealth (usually in the UK). This approach is analogous to many debates about aid and development assistance at the time – with Australian politicians still believing Australia to be a 'developing country', while simultaneously wanting to support the development of other developing countries in the region (not always for purely altruistic reasons). These events also highlighted, once again, the lack of focus of policymakers and policy negotiators (in the case of the Oxford Conference Delegation) on the Pacific. The Colombo Plan loomed large as a focus, and a frame for Australian scholarships and aid. It was not only a model to emulate (as the proposed Pacific Colombo Plan highlights), but it was also a way to limit aid, which was demonstrated by discussions around the CSFP.

The CSFP is an example of the fact that scholarship programs were interpreted differently by different actors. Each participant nation had a different view of what purpose the scholarships would serve, and the decentralised nature of the scheme allowed that differentiation to flourish. The scheme, and the negotiations that led to it, offer a glimpse into the thinking of newly independent Commonwealth countries and British and Australian colonies as decolonisation approached. Politicians struggled with the new power structures, and it is perhaps unsurprising that the Australian version of the scheme was used to strengthen existing connections (or by the description provided by the New Zealand delegation – spokes) to the metropole hub (the UK) and other developed Commonwealth nations such as Canada. There were awards for students from the Pacific, but only a small proportion of the overall total. Power was not equal; the dynamic of empire was still very much in play. The Oxford Conference also provides an interesting view into a moment of policy sharing: each nation brought its own plans to the table. The sharing of knowledge around scholarships is clear in the adaptation of policies around the world, but the unbalanced nature of the exchange was clear. Understanding how these negotiations took place is important because, as historian Charlotte Riley has noted: 'More closely interrogating the history of these processes, then, enables both

historians and practitioners to more fully understand the ongoing legacies of imperial rule around the globe'.<sup>75</sup> The CSFP is both a legacy of imperial rule, and a signifier of the end of that rule.

While the CSFP was a part of the government's suite of scholarships until the 2000s, it never became a feature of the aid program and was more readily used to send Australian students to the UK for study – in the radial, hub-and-spokes model predicted by British civil servants and feared by bureaucrats from New Zealand at the time of the Oxford Conference. For some students, such as Judy Wong, it served as part of a story of a life that took her far from Fiji. The opportunity to study in Australia under other scholarships was also life changing for others, such as Joseph Aoae, who went on to become a lawyer and a member of parliament in PNG. And while Joseph Aoae was able to achieve this success, this was despite significant problems in the approach of the Australian Government in relation to widening access to higher education in the colony of TPNG. These are addressed in further detail in the following chapter.

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<sup>75</sup> Charlotte Lydia Riley, "'Tropical Allsorts': The Transnational Flavor of British Development Policies in Africa", *Journal of World History* 26, no. 4 (2015): 864, doi.org/10.1353/jwh.2016.0065.

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