

Commonwealth scholarships get a new, leaner life

BRITISH TRADITION: CANADIAN ALUMNI INSTRUMENTAL IN SAVING PROGRAM

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Published in the Globe and Mail October 8, 2008

The British government has cancelled its plans to end the prestigious Commonwealth scholarship program for Canadians, agreeing instead to support a scaled-down version of the awards.

The change of heart comes after months of lobbying efforts by scholars on both sides of the Atlantic, as well as past recipients of the scholarships, created 50 years ago at the urging of Canadian Sidney Smith as a way to strengthen Commonwealth ties.

Under the new scheme, administered by the British Department of Innovation, Universities and Skills, costs will be shared by the government and the participating universities. So far, the universities of Oxford, Cambridge, Edinburgh and Nottingham have agreed to take part. Organizers expect others to join the program this fall. Only scholarships for doctoral students will be offered - a departure from the old program that funded studies at the PhD and master's levels.

The scale of the program also has been trimmed, with between six and 18 fellowships available each year. Canadians will be eligible for between six and 10 of those spots; the remainder will go to seven other Commonwealth countries that also were set to be cut from the program, including New Zealand, Cyprus and the Bahamas. In recent years, about 30 Canadians annually have received the scholarships to study in Britain.

Past recipients have included Bank of Canada Governor Mark Carney, University of British Columbia president Stephen Toope, and Clerk of the Privy Council Kevin Lynch.

A groundswell of support from Canada - traditionally the biggest contributor of scholars to the program - was key to reversing the decision, said Jennifer Humphries, vice-president of membership and scholarships at the Canadian Bureau for International Education, the non-profit group that administers the fellowships. "Canadian alumni were absolutely instrumental in this," she said.

The British government had planned to direct scholarships to students from countries important to foreign policy such as China and India.

Article retrieved October 8, 2008 from:

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