

Mobility Grant for Cambridge-Africa PhD graduates

Background

The Cambridge-Africa PhD scholarship scheme was set up in 2015 and recruited 7 cohorts of 5 students, with the last intake in 2021. The scheme recruited students from Sub-Saharan Africa, who choose to work on projects that are of priority to their countries/ continent. While this is not a condition of the grant, an aspiration of the scheme is that these scholars will apply the research skills acquired in Cambridge to contribute to the research ecosystem in Africa, so that we are enhancing the pool of talent rather than contributing to Africa's 'brain-drain'.

Dr Damilola Adebayo, a Cambridge Africa PhD scholar, wrote a report on this scholarship scheme for the period 2015 to 2019. He interviewed all 25 scholars past and present, 10 of whom had either submitted their thesis or graduated. Most of these scholars stay abroad either to acquire additional skills or work in international institutes. Of those that would want to return 'home', many are discouraged to do so due to lack of infrastructure and the absence of research grants to enable them establish a research group. Dr Adebayo's report suggested that Cambridge-Africa should establish a 'Africa Engagement Fund'. This would be a pot of money that scholars who finish their PhD's and want to return home, or engage more deeply with an African institution, can apply for as they come to the end of their PhD. In response to this, and after discussion with the Cambridge-Africa Strategic Advisory Group (CASAG), we established the Cambridge-Africa Mobility Grant for Cambridge-Africa PhD graduates, with the support of the ALBORADA Trust.

Aims of scheme

The primary aim of the grant is to encourage graduating PhD scholars to (re-)engage with colleagues, Universities and Research Institutes in Africa. A secondary aim is to give these early career researchers experience in grant-writing, to build their skills for the future and in obtaining larger, competitive grant funding.

The aim of the award is to enable scholars to undertake activities that they would not have been able to pursue without the award.

Application

Cambridge-Africa Scholars can apply after submitting their PhD thesis. Awards will be made once the scholar has graduated (or in case graduation is delayed, once their PhD supervisor confirms that all post-viva corrections have been made and accepted). Scholars do not need to apply during the usual Cambridge-Africa ALBORADA Research Fund cycle, however the application will follow the standard principles and format of this scheme (see <https://www.cambridge-africa.cam.ac.uk/initiatives/the-alborada-research-fund/> for details). In particular, we note that applications should have co-PIs from Cambridge and Africa in order to promote collaboration and allow the scholars to (re-)connect with African institutions. The African PI should be based in a University or Research Institute. In the event that the PhD scholar themselves has moved to an African University or Research Institute, they can be the African PI and a colleague (possibly their PhD supervisor) can be the Cambridge PI.

In the first instance, scholars should contact the Cambridge-Africa Programme Manager for an informal discussion about the scheme. Applicants should then prepare a case for support (3 pages) detailing the research, the nature of the collaboration and how this is of benefit to the graduating scholar's career and an itemised budget of up to £10,000. Proposals for equipment grants will also be considered, provided the equipment is for use in Africa. The application will be peer-reviewed, and feedback will be given; a revised application may be invited. Please note that only proposals of a high standard will be funded; this is not an automatic benefit for graduating scholars.

Award

As with standard Cambridge-Africa ALBORADA Research Fund awards, the funds will be administered by the Cambridge host Department. In the case that graduating scholars have already left Cambridge, arrangements should be made with their PhD supervisor to host the funds.

A final report and blog for the Cambridge-Africa website should be submitted within 45 days of the end of the award.