

The UK Neuropsychology International Fellowship Scheme

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Fellowship Scheme

The Neuropsychology International Fellowship (NIF) scheme was set up in 2009 while I was President of the British Neuropsychological Society (BNS) and while I was also a member of the executive committee of the Division of Neuropsychology of the British Psychological Society (BPS). The reasons for setting up the scheme were simple, and in some ways personal. I was born in India, and grew up in a family that had firm Gandhian principles of Truth and Compassion. In the 1980s, I had decided to donate all my book royalties to healthcare charities in India, and setting up the fellowship scheme was a natural follow-on from that commitment. In the early 1970s, I had briefly met some neuropsychologists in India, and it immediately struck me how they were struggling to cope with limited resources. So, being on both the BNS and BPS committees put me in a unique position to make an important contribution that would help colleagues in India and other developing countries. I am pleased to say that I got immediate and full backing from my BNS and BPS colleagues. The British may have had an imperial past, but they are more than imperial and brilliant in their generosity and aid to developing countries, and we are lucky and proud in the UK to be living in a country which was one of the first to sign up to the UN commitment of donating 0.7% of GDP to overseas aid.

The NIF scheme was launched in 2010, with the first fellows taking up their awards in 2011. Two NIF awards are made each year. The awards are worth £1000 each, with one award funded by the BPS Division of Neuropsychology and one by the British Neuropsychological Society. The awards are primarily intended to support neuropsychologists from developing countries to gain knowledge, skills and experience by spending some time in UK, though there is also a provision for a NIF fellow to travel to a developing country from the UK. NIF applications provide a detailed case as to how the award would benefit the work of the individual and also more generally clinical services, teaching and research in their home country. After they complete their visit, visiting fellows provide a report to the BNS and BPS. A committee oversees the running of the scheme, and the committee is chaired by myself. Applications are rated by committee members and/or independent experts. If a

committee member or independent expert has a conflict of interest (e.g. the candidate is a former student), he/she does not take part in the rating.

A key component of the scheme is Dissemination. All successful fellows are given a detailed Dissemination guidance document which indicates the ways in which they should share the knowledge, skills and experience they have gained. This is done to maximize the impact in their home country, both in terms of helping patients and helping colleagues/students. We therefore ask them to write a follow-up report within six months of their return to outline the actions they have taken.

Experience of Fellows

So far (up to 2020), fellowships have been awarded to candidates from the following countries – India, Bangladesh, South Africa, Cambodia, Estonia and Zambia. All of the fellows have spoken highly of the scheme and of how they have benefited from it. A number of publications have directly or indirectly resulted from the visits of fellows. A few quotes may be informative –

'My visit helped me to establish many useful contacts with neuropsychologists working in UK. The experience from a dementia centre inspired me to work on improving the services in my home country. Since then we have established a workgroup that is working towards that goal. The experience I got is without a doubt reflected in my everyday work with patients.'

'Some of the direct influence of the knowledge I gained from my NIF is as follows – changes in the tests being used, more specifically, the battery I used for epilepsy surgery patients was improved greatly by my visit to a UK epilepsy centre. I have been able to train 12 students and professionals in the field of neuropsychology. After attending several discussion meetings in various centres, I was inspired to start a Brain group - where students and professionals meet to discuss topics related to neuroscience and neuropsychology. During my visit to the Walton centre in Liverpool, I was fortunate to have observed an awake craniotomy. Following my visit I was able to return to India and assist the neurosurgeon for an awake craniotomy. The NIF also helped me make connections with professionals who act as mentors which we lack in India. I am in constant conversation with them to ensure good neuropsychology practices.'

'Thanks to this award by the BPS and the BNS, I maximized my visit by meeting people from both experimental and clinical setups. This not only reiterated the importance of inputs from both schools of thought that help advance research in neuropsychology, but

also opened up collaborations in both fields for our clinic. Visits to these centres also shed light on looking at research problems in new ways. All my liaisons were willing to extend their support towards our work and my discussions with them affirmed that the outlook towards neuropsychology research at some centres in India is, in many ways, in keeping with standards of those of research units in the UK. '

Other indirect outcomes include closer links between Neuropsychology in India and UK, with several Neuropsychology workshops held in India over the past few years, and visiting faculty including experts from UK, Australia and USA. At the July 2016 meeting of the International Neuropsychological Society, a cross-cultural Neuropsychology symposium included a speaker (Dr Aparna Dutt) who was a Neuropsychology Fellow in 2011. While on an academic visit in the UK in 2014, Dr Dutt spent time at the West London Neurosciences Centre, Charing Cross Hospital, gave a workshop on cross-cultural neuropsychology, carried out an audit of ethnic cases referred for dementia and gave advice to local neuropsychologists on problem ethnic cases. Since the time of her fellowship, she has agreed to lecture on cross-cultural issues for both the Bristol and the Glasgow post-qualification Neuropsychology courses. In July 2016, Dr Dutt gave a lecture on cross-cultural neuropsychological assessment at a UCL conference on Advances in Neuropsychology Practice. One of our other fellows from India, Siddharth Ramanan, was able to use his 2014 UK fellowship visit to complete a research study which acted as a springboard for him to secure a research fellowship position in a leading neuropsychology lab in Australia and then progress in his career to taking up a senior research post in the UK.

What would I like to see happen next?

I would like two things to happen. I would like every Neuropsychological Association in the world, whether it is country-specific or (in the USA) state-specific, to set up a similar fellowship scheme. Secondly, I would like every such association to follow the lead of a number of academic and professional societies, in the light of the Black Lives Matter movement, and set up a Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) committee to explore and put in place ways to helping clinicians and academics in our field who are at a disadvantage, due to factors such as discrimination, disability, lack of resources, lack of opportunities for training or mentorship, etc. DEI committees should become the norm, and perhaps be renamed DDEI – Disadvantage, Diversity, Equity and Inclusion. Initiatives could include such as remote mentoring, providing internships & travel grants, offering workshops in developing countries, donating surplus test

materials or books to those in developing countries, and setting up funds to help providers. It is important to remember that the benefits from schemes such as NIF will often be two-way. It is often the case that we learn about the complexity of our field from our colleagues in developing countries. We constantly face challenges, be they global challenges such as dealing with pandemics or specific challenges such as dealing with a difficult cross-cultural neuropsychological assessment. Our colleagues in developing countries often have invaluable experience which they can share, and so it is to the benefit of everyone to become global citizens and reach out beyond our shores.