


CASE STUDY

COMMONWEALTH SCHOLARSHIP COMMISSION

SECURE ONLINE APPLICATIONS FOR SEVEN SCHEMES



TOPLEVEL HAS HELPED THE COMMONWEALTH SCHOLARSHIP COMMISSION (CSC) CREATE AN ELECTRONIC APPLICATION SYSTEM (EAS) THAT ALLOWS CANDIDATES FROM 53 COUNTRIES AROUND THE WORLD TO SECURELY SUBMIT APPLICATIONS FOR THE CSC'S SCHOLARSHIPS.

Launched in 2009, Toplevel's solution has improved the quality of information that candidates provide by guiding them through the application process, while helping the CSC to more effectively administer a complex process involving numerous agencies around the globe.

The Toplevel solution has also significantly reduced the volume of paper involved in applications and helped the CSC to deliver substantial quality improvements, such as increasing the number of references received per applicant, whilst enabling CSC to meet their requirement to comply with the Data Protection Act.



**COMMONWEALTH
SCHOLARSHIPS**

REQUIREMENT

The Commonwealth Scholarship Commission (CSC) offers Scholarships to candidates in Commonwealth countries for academic and professional study in the UK. Awards are funded by the Department for International Development, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills and the

Scottish Government, and in conjunction with UK universities. Each year, CSC receives around 15,000 applications and makes awards to some 700 candidates across seven schemes.

The application process is complex, with candidates applying through Agencies in their local country, which each operate

their own selection processes to decide which candidates to forward to the CSC's selection committee.

Candidates must also provide references, receive recommendations from potential supervisors and gain approval from the institutions where they wish to study.



MULTI-AGENCY COLLABORATION

Toplevel has built a collaborative multi-agency solution for CSC providing seven online services that allow candidates to submit their applications entirely online and, if their country Agency is using the system, track the progress of their application and see which references and recommendations have been received. Agencies can use EAS to assess candidates and send applications to external advisers, while CSC uses the data captured by EAS to report on and manage the process.

All users have access to onscreen help within the system and can easily access step-by-step guidance notes and FAQs on the CSC website. EAS is also integrated with CSC's back office database, which is used to administer the awards process.

This allows the back office database to be automatically populated with data captured in EAS, eliminating much of the manual data entry required with the previous paper based solution.

"One of the main aims of creating an EAS was to reduce the volume of paper

involved in applications," explains Peter Bourdillon, the CSC's assessor for medical awards, who was the driving force behind EAS. "We also felt having an EAS would help us to publicise the Commonwealth Scholarship scheme as widely as possible, ensure Agencies stick to their quota of candidates and reduce the number of late applications they submit, and give us better oversight of the reference process so we can increase the number of references received per applicant."



WHY TOPLEVEL

Because Toplevel's products are based on open standards, CSC also knew it would be relatively straightforward to integrate online services developed in Toplevel with existing applications such as their back office database and third-party reporting tools. In addition, Toplevel's solution offers government-strength security, validated through testing by a CHECK provider approved by the UK government's Information Assurance arm, giving CSC the confidence that handling of personal data about candidates would comply with the requirements of the Data Protection Act.

Finally, Toplevel provides the solution as a hosted service, taking away the management headache of delivering round-the-clock availability to users in multiple time zones.

The first four online services - three for the Scholarship programme and one for the Academic Staff Fellowship programme - were ready in just under six months. This gave CSC time to run a pilot with 80 applicants who had been successful in the 2008 Awards before launching EAS for the 2009 Awards process.

CSC and Toplevel then worked together to develop another three online services, for the Distance Learning, Professional Fellowship and Shared Scholarship programmes, over the next 6 months.



HIGH TAKE-UP

The system is so easy to use that take-up has been excellent. As a consequence, CSC was able to make it mandatory for candidates use EAS to submit their applications in 2010, several years earlier than anticipated.

"Many candidates have commented on how easy the system is to use," Bourdillon points out. "Although we knew there would be issues with moving to an electronic application process in some countries where the technology infrastructure isn't particularly well developed, we knew we could expect enough IT literacy from candidates to use the system and that, even though internet access in universities and in private homes can be patchy, there's usually a good network of internet cafes where candidates can complete their forms. Since this is such a prestigious award, we know candidates are prepared to

make the effort to seek out the facilities they need."

While all candidates used EAS in 2010, just ten per cent of agencies are currently using the system to forward on their nominations electronically, although Bourdillon is actively encouraging all to do so by 2012.

Two are additionally benefiting from CSC being able to use EAS to run pre-selection criteria on their candidates, reducing the number of forms they have to review.

In the UK, all 17 institutions involved in the Distance Learning Scholarship scheme are using EAS to recruit candidates. Just over a third of the 57 universities involved in awarding Shared Scholarships are using EAS, while the rest continue to use their own recruitment procedures and then ask the candidates they wish to nominate to the scheme to complete an EAS application.

"UK institutions are benefiting significantly from the improved communication CSC can provide because we're receiving information in a consistent format and can more easily forward applications on to them, as well as more easily track the progress of applications," Bourdillon explains.

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The quality of information from both candidates and agencies has improved since introducing EAS"

PETER BOURDILLON, ASSESSOR FOR MEDICAL AWARDS

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"EAS provides CSC with a secure multi-agency portal, protecting access to information according to strict business rules and we are delighted that they have achieved such impressive take-up. The benefits so far have given everyone an appreciation of how much can be achieved with online services, providing a strong foundation for the years to come."

JANE ROBERTS, TOPLEVEL DIRECTOR.

BENEFITS

Once the forms, references and reports are received, they go to the Commissioners who review nominations and make awards at selection committee meetings. Most Commissioners are still carrying out their reviews using printouts, but Bourdillon says they have been pleased to find the amount of paper they receive has halved since introducing EAS. Those assessors, including Bourdillon, who have carried out reviews entirely onscreen say working entirely online was extremely easy. Having all the data to hand electronically also brings benefits during selection committee meetings.

"When Commissioners have questions during reviews, we can now answer them in just a few minutes from the data we have," Bourdillon says.

"Before EAS was implemented, we simply didn't have that data available and we wouldn't have even bothered to look for an answer to the question."

The data from EAS also helps the Commission better understand how agencies in each country are advertising schemes and recruiting candidates, allowing the Commission to work more closely with them to improve those processes.

"Previously, that was something of a black box," Bourdillon says. "Now we know a lot more about what they're doing and their reasons for working that way, such as needing to nominate candidates with a spread of ethnic or tribal backgrounds."

CSC will now concentrate on getting all participants, especially country Agencies, to use EAS to the full. Bourdillon concludes, "Toplevel is a good company to work with and extremely flexible. They were willing to meet our timescales for development, so that we could go live in 2009, and their customer service is always very responsive and helpful."

TOPLEVEL – Secure online case management

Call us now or use the enquiry form on our website to discuss how we can help you deliver your next project.

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