

FELLOWSHIP PROGRAMME

SINCE 1966, IARC HAS AWARDED 570 FELLOWSHIPS TO TALENTED YOUNG SCIENTISTS FROM 73 COUNTRIES. OF THE FELLOWSHIPS AWARDED, 23% HAVE BEEN IN THE AREAS OF EPIDEMIOLOGY OR BIostatISTICS WITH THE REMAINING 77% SPLIT AMONG VARIOUS LABORATORY-ORIENTED DISCIPLINES. IN THE FIRST 30 YEARS OF THE PROGRAMME THE FELLOWS WERE PREDOMINANTLY MALE (~80%), HOWEVER IN THE PAST 10 YEARS THE NUMBER OF WOMEN RECEIVING IARC FELLOWSHIPS HAS INCREASED TO 54%. APPROXIMATELY 85% OF FELLOWS RETURN TO THEIR HOME COUNTRY ON COMPLETION OF THEIR TRAINING, AND AROUND 82% REMAIN ACTIVE IN CANCER RESEARCH .



Director, IARC, opening a session of the Fellowships Selection Committee in a room put at the disposal of the Agency by the Mayor of Lyon.

Figure 1. Dr Higginson, first Director of the Agency, chairing a Fellowship Selection Committee at the Lyon City Hall in 1967.

IARC Fellowships are governed by WHO Fellowship rules and regulations, adapted to meet IARC's specific needs. Since the beginning of the Programme, Fellows have been selected on the basis of scientific excellence by a selection committee composed of external scientists of international reputation in the field of cancer research, together with scientists working at IARC and representatives from WHO and from the Union for International Cancer Control (UICC). The UICC has been a partner since the first days of the Programme and runs a cancer research fellowship programme complementary to that of IARC.

Given the importance of epidemiology for research in cancer etiology and cancer control, and as one of the core components of IARC's activities, particularly in developing countries, the IARC Fellowship Programme has traditionally given considerable

emphasis to this discipline. During the first decades of the Programme, IARC Fellowships were one of the few international fellowships to provide training in cancer epidemiology. At that time in most regions of the world, including various countries in western Europe, there was a virtual absence of graduate training programmes in chronic disease epidemiology, and the Programme funded several Fellows to obtain a formal degree in epidemiology from international schools of public health.

From 1966 to 2004, the IARC Fellowships were aimed at postdoctoral scientists, from any country in the world, who wished to receive training in another country in an area relevant to the etiology and pathogenesis of cancer. During this period, 528 fellowships were awarded, with 80% hosted in laboratories in the USA, the United Kingdom and France, and 11% at IARC. Although the majority of Fellows over this period came from developed countries (64%), the

Programme made a significant impact by training candidates from former eastern European countries (18%) and LMICs (19%). It should be noted that, up to 1990, the IARC Fellowship Programme was one of the few programmes that permitted young scientists from eastern Europe to visit other countries and maintain a scientific link with the international research community.

The Education and Training Programme was restructured in 2004, with the goal of ensuring IARC's resources were devoted to providing a unique contribution to training in cancer research, by refocusing the benefit of the Programme to LMICs. Because of this, IARC Fellowships were restricted to LMIC candidates and uniquely tenable at the Agency. From 2005 to 2009, 28 fellowships were awarded. The fellowship duration was extended to two years and a return grant (seed grant) introduced, to enable the Fellow to set up a collaborative research project upon return to their home country.

In 2010, after successfully securing the award of a grant (0.84 million Euros over a period of four years) from the European Union's 7th RTD Framework Programme (Marie Curie COFUND), and to increase the number and quality of applications received, the fellowships were opened again to candidates from any country wishing to be trained at IARC. However, the focus on LMICs was maintained by giving priority to candidates from, or with projects of benefit to, LMICs. Approximately 6–8 new fellowships are awarded annually, with the same number of extensions for a second year (Figure 2)

Following interest expressed by the Agency's participating states, two new elements were introduced to the Programme in 2010–2011: the IARC-Australia Postdoctoral Fellowships, sponsored by Cancer Council Australia, based on the established two year fellowship model; and the IARC-Ireland Postdoctoral Fellowships, sponsored by the Irish Cancer Society, offering a three-year fellowship.

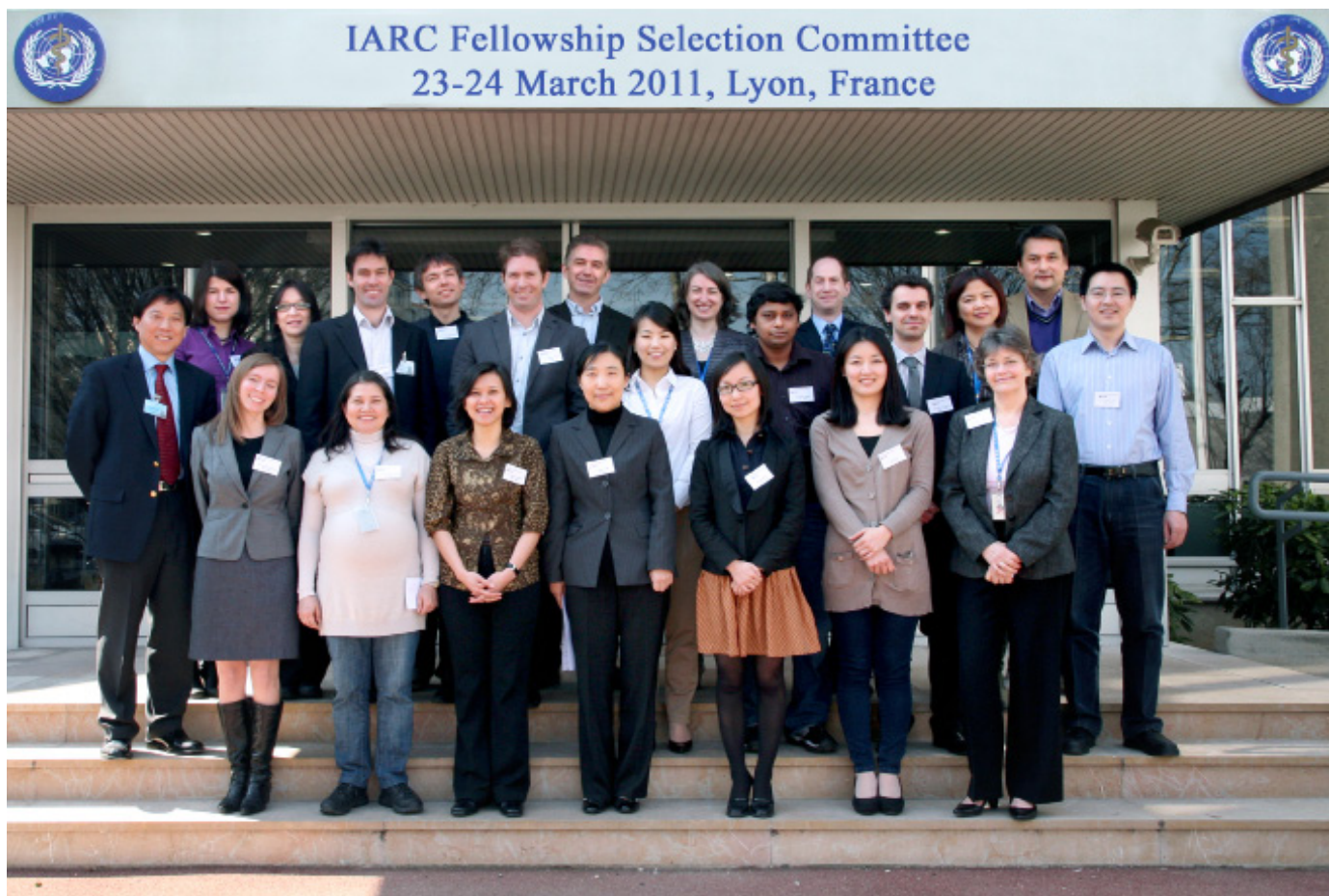


Figure 2. Committee members and IARC Fellows

The Agency continues to actively pursue means of developing and enhancing the Programme, a major step forward being the introduction in September 2011 of the Postdoctoral Fellowship Charter. This is a useful tool in the training of future Fellows. The objective being to reinforce generic training and to provide a more structured approach to performance evaluation and career development.

OTHER FEATURES

A Senior Visiting Scientist Award was introduced in 1983 to enable a senior scientist to spend a sabbatical period at IARC, bringing innovative research, not only to the host research Group, but to IARC's programmes at large. To date, 34 awards have been made.

In an effort to reinforce IARC's mission to enhance cancer research and cancer prevention in LMICs, the Expertise Transfer Fellowship was begun in 2006 to enable a senior scientist to transfer their knowledge and expertise to a host institute in an LMIC. Four fellowships have been awarded to date, all in the area of epidemiology.

FUNDING

As a core activity, the Education and Training Programme is mainly financed through IARC's budget, however, it has enjoyed support over time from several external sources. With specific regard to the Fellowship Programme, support has been received from the Italian Association for Research on Cancer (AICR), the EU 7th RTD Framework Programme (Marie Curie COFUND), the Cancer Council Australia and the Irish Cancer Society.

ALUMNI

The IARC Alumni Group was created in 2011 within the LinkedIn® social network, with the purpose of bringing together former Agency staff, visiting scientists, fellows, postdocs and students. It provides a way of creating a community of people who have spent time at IARC in the past, promoting informal discussion and networking and a means for keeping the members informed of activities and opportunities at the Agency.

IARC Alumni Group page: <http://www.linkedin.com/groups?mostPopular=&gclid=3713610>

CONCLUSION

Over the past 45 years, IARC's Education and Training Programme has made a substantial contribution to the development of cancer research programmes in many countries, especially in the field of cancer epidemiology, with special emphasis on LMICs. In particular, the Fellowship Programme has played a major role in shaping the Agency's research strategy and activities and contributed significantly to building IARC's wide network of collaborators. Over the years it has provided the first contact with the Agency for several scientists who would later become some of its most senior staff members.