

Conclusions

The Becas Chile Programme (BCP) is imaginative and transformative. It is based on the assumption that Chile can play at the leading edge of international advances in the generation and application of knowledge. By any international comparison it is expansive in the number of its participants and generous in the benefits it provides for them. The review team is encouraged by the commitment of the government of Chile, as evidenced through its various advanced human capital formation initiatives on the domestic front, to optimise the impact of the BCP.

Typically, one can expect bold initiatives to experience initial implementation difficulties. Normally, early corrective action taken to manage transitional problems alleviates most of the concerns, and as the teething lessons translate into procedural improvements, the initiative matures and embeds itself in the policy architecture. At the time of this review of the BCP, difficulties in its implementation have become evident. Problems with some administrative processes, particularly the processes for assessing the merits of BCP post-graduate applicants, have given rise to concerns among the public primarily about administrative competence. However, in the case of the BCP, the review team concludes that the BCP has several procedural problems and challenges and also aspects of its programme design that can be improved in the next stages of the programme to meet its objectives. Hence, ways by which the positive features of the BCP may be built upon are not to be found only through organisational and procedural reforms. Attention needs to be given to the policy purpose of the BCP and its integration with other efforts to increase advanced human capital formation and innovation in Chile.

Strengths of the initiative

The BCP is attractive in its scale and orientation. It has the particular benefit of widening choices for individuals to pursue further learning outside the constraints of the offerings available in Chile. Returning BCP graduates can add to domestic capabilities and help in the transformation of Chile's

higher education and training systems. It stands to make significant progress toward giving Chile the critical mass of highly qualified human capital needed to reach its economic and social aspirations. Its responsiveness to student demand gives signals to domestic providers of higher education services to improve their own offerings. It also has several innovative design features, notably:

- the comprehensiveness of eligible participants across academic and practical fields, and the public and private sectors;
- the incentives given to raise the participation of indigenous people, women, people from regional areas and people with disabilities; and
- considered features, such as the inclusion of foreign language instruction prior to the start of foreign training, allowing students from less advantaged backgrounds to seek and win scholarships.

Concerns about the initiative

The review team has four areas of concern for the BCP: its strategic integration to national priorities; the attraction and reinsertion of BCP graduates to Chile; the operational integrity and efficiency of the programme as a whole; and the policy changes and institutional restructurings that best further the development of advanced human capital in Chile.

Strategic integration to national priorities

The BCP needs to be more sharply focused on national priorities. Chile has been particularly careful, more so than most developing countries, in its efforts to be focused in the development of economic areas. The substantial investment in the BCP should reinforce this selective approach and more explicitly support CNIC priorities, including through stronger weights given for particular studies in the evaluation of applications. Although the BCP model of individual learner choice is laudable, efforts must be made to ensure that the sum of individual choices do not fall short of meeting Chile's human capital development needs.

The BCP could be enhanced and its effectiveness increased through greater flexibility of its existing elements – the enlargement of opportunities for post doctorates to study abroad for periods of less than a year and the expansion of short-cycle programmes – and the inclusion of three new elements: institution-based scholarships where funds are directed to tertiary institutions to select participants; an enhanced scheme to attract visiting professors from institutions abroad, especially in fields of education and

research that Chile is seeking to develop; and enterprise-based scholarships where funds are directed to firms to select participants. This could include:

- An amount of funding for institution-based scholarships could enable tertiary institutions to develop the capacities they need to provide quality education and training programmes in the future, enable the Chilean institutions to build relations with foreign institutions, and provide employment for returning graduates.
- An amount of funding for visiting professors could help to modernise aspects of Chilean education and training, promote a two-way flow of scholars, and thereby contribute to the internationalisation of the Chilean system. It would be worthwhile to reinstate that component of the initially-envisaged BCP, designed to bring foreign scholars to regional tertiary institutions.
- An amount of funding for enterprise-based scholarships could similarly encourage greater involvement of Chilean firms in the programme, help them address their skills requirements and build their capacities for innovation, and provide returning graduates with enhanced employment opportunities.

Additionally, the scale of the BCP, especially the level of increase in PhD production, generates downstream challenges for the capacity of Chilean higher education and research. Those challenges will only be met effectively through a commitment on the part of the Chilean government and desirably enterprises, to continue increasing R&D expenditures in order to make productive use of the added talent.

Attraction back to Chile and reinsertion of BCP graduates

There is also a need for a more purposeful approach to attracting home and reinserting BCP graduates into productive activities. International experience suggests that incentives to return are more effective than coercive or punitive approaches. Employment opportunities for graduates may be increased through improved information to guide student study choices and closer alignment with national priorities at the scholarship awarding stage.

The inclusion of an Institution Scholarship Sub-programme and enterprise-based scholarships would facilitate graduate reinsertion. The attractiveness of Chile as a point of return for BCP graduates, and as a place for visiting professors and other foreigners to work, could be enhanced through a programme of infrastructure development for education and research.

Additionally, the inclination to return and stay in Chile might be influenced through actions to build networks among participants before they go abroad, while they are studying and after they return.

Operational integrity and efficiency

Improving the design and implementation of the BCP will require making a number of inter-related reforms to increase the quality of information available to guide student choice, on the one hand, and to improve the evaluation of the relative merits of applicants, on the other. Insufficient information, particularly about the capacities of foreign institutions in particular fields, may have led to superficial decision making by applicants and variable assessments of applications by evaluators. Applicants need to have better information on which to base their study preferences. They also need to understand what is involved in studying in a foreign country and how they can relate their studies to future employment opportunities in Chile.

Currently, the assessment of the evaluators is translated into a single number, and a single committee selects a “cut off point” for quality among all applicants for the same type of scholarship. This type of system works best when the numerical score is in large measure based on some objective assessment tool common to all applicants – such as scores on a standardised test of aptitude or achievement. BCP applicants do not share any common objective measure of merit. There is no standardised test that measures aptitude or achievement. Grades vary by institution, and other measures, such as recommendations, are likewise subjective.

The two main changes that this reports suggests in this regard are: (i) the revitalisation of the Oversight Committee to set clear general policy for the selection process in a way that minimises potential variability and inaccuracy, and that properly incorporates programme goals; and (ii) the creation of specific “panel committees” in a variety of disciplines or areas to determine “cut off points” at a less aggregate level, and to provide other key judgments on specifics issues related to sub-groups of candidates.

The revitalised Oversight Committee would receive general policy guidance on major issues from the Inter-Ministerial Committee and, subsequently, work with the BCP Executive Secretariat to develop detailed policies and guidelines. The Oversight Committee would provide guidance to the panel committees on how to rate programme and institutional quality, how to ensure the point system adequately and uniformly addresses relevance to national priorities, and how to undertake a first “cull” of

applications, among other things. In addition, it would oversee the intensive collection of feedback from reviewers and analyse the evaluation process to identify areas for further improvement for future years.

Panel committees would reduce the variability in the absence of objective measures in three ways. First, they could group the quality of the programmes for the applicants in their pool before the applications are sent to individual evaluators. For instance, if the Life Sciences Panel were to find that 150 applicants for PhDs had listed a total of 200 different programmes to which they were applying, the panel committee could collectively group these into perhaps three categories: superior, highly suitable and other. This ranking would reflect the judgment of several specialists, and then could be uniformly applied to all applicants. Second, for measures of national priority, the panel committees could arrive at a uniform measure that could be equally applied.

Third, the panel committees could devise – under guidance from the Oversight Committee – ways of “culling” those applications that are clearly not competitive. For example, where Master’s degrees are concerned, if there are 500 applications for 100 scholarships, the panel committee could separate the applicant pool into two broad categories: stronger and weaker. If the Committee’s selection of the top 60% applications were placed in the “stronger” group, one could avoid sending for individual review the 200 weakest applications. In doing this, evaluators could spend more time on the candidates who are most likely to be given the 100 available places, reducing the workload and thereby decreasing errors and variability resulting from haste or overload by evaluators.

Institutional arrangement

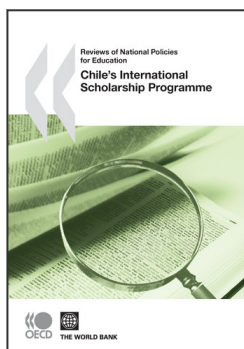
The measures outlined above are preconditions of improved BCP effectiveness and efficiency. The rectification of the programme design flaws identified will require a more coherent policy approach across the human capital formation and national innovation systems. Solutions to the operational problems go beyond the co-ordination of study abroad arrangements. Reorganisation of administering agencies by itself will not be sufficient to resolve the structural difficulties. In the context of concerns arising from BCP implementation breakdowns, the opportunity arises for the Chilean government to integrate its policy making capacity for human capital formation.

An option worth particular consideration is the creation of a Vice-Ministry for Higher Education, Science and Technology. That role could be given responsibility for policy in relation to all investments in education and training and research, including domestic and international scholarships. The

review team envisages a strong policy unit being formed within the Education Ministry, reporting to the Vice-Minister or a Human Capital Development Agency.

This new institution should bring together Chile's domestic and international efforts to raise skills-based productivity. In order to avoid duplication and improve system efficiency, the administration of scholarships, domestic and international, should be removed from CONICYT, CPEIP, PIAP and DIVESUP and absorbed by the new Human Capital Development Agency.

Finally, the government should consider deliberate arrangements for engaging the academic and business communities in the development and assessment of the BCP, and more generally, creating an explicit framework and capacity to evaluate the effectiveness of its advanced human capital formation strategies. Evaluative exercises undertaken within this framework should be conducted professionally, involve multiple stakeholders and explicitly address the broad objectives of the BCP and its integration with Chile's strategies for advanced human capital development and innovation.



From:
Chile's International Scholarship Programme

Access the complete publication at:
<https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264086425-en>

Please cite this chapter as:

OECD/The World Bank (2010), "Conclusions", in *Chile's International Scholarship Programme*, OECD Publishing, Paris.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264086425-9-en>

This work is published under the responsibility of the Secretary-General of the OECD. The opinions expressed and arguments employed herein do not necessarily reflect the official views of OECD member countries.

This document and any map included herein are without prejudice to the status of or sovereignty over any territory, to the delimitation of international frontiers and boundaries and to the name of any territory, city or area.

You can copy, download or print OECD content for your own use, and you can include excerpts from OECD publications, databases and multimedia products in your own documents, presentations, blogs, websites and teaching materials, provided that suitable acknowledgment of OECD as source and copyright owner is given. All requests for public or commercial use and translation rights should be submitted to rights@oecd.org. Requests for permission to photocopy portions of this material for public or commercial use shall be addressed directly to the Copyright Clearance Center (CCC) at info@copyright.com or the Centre français d'exploitation du droit de copie (CFC) at contact@cfcopies.com.