

**Comments of RCA Programme Advisory Committee on  
the Feasibility Study Report for the RCA Scholarship Programme**

Since the main role of the RCA Programme Advisory Committee (PAC) is to advise the RCA NRs on matters related to the RCA Technical Cooperative Programme, PAC has reviewed the above report prepared by the RCA Scholarship Committee in view of its potential impact on the RCA TC Programme.

The PAC wishes to express its appreciation to the RCA Scholarship Committee for preparation of a comprehensive feasibility study report.

The PAC recommends the RCA GPs very carefully consider both the positive and negative aspects of the proposal to establish a RCA Scholarship Programme before deciding to implement it.

PAC wishes to present its views on the Feasibility Study Report and the proposal to establish a Scholarship Programme under RCA, which are given below, for the consideration of the 51<sup>st</sup> RCA GCM. These views are based on Version 23 of the report, received by PAC Chair on the 8<sup>th</sup> of September.

In view of the very limited time PAC had to review the report, these observations should be considered preliminary.

**1. Effect on the resources available for the RCA Programme**

RCA currently has a very limited amount of financial resources for implementation of its Technical Cooperative Programme. Efforts to increase the RCA financial resource base has met with a limited success. As the 44<sup>th</sup> RCA NRM was informed, IAEA TC funds available for new projects under RCA Programme of 2024/25 amounts to 1.47 million Euros per year, which is sufficient only for 4 projects at an average budget of 180,000 Euros per project per year. One additional project was made possible by EB funds to be provided by AUL. One more project is awaiting EB funds for implementation.

According to the Feasibility Study Report the IAEA TC funds during the pilot stage of three years would be 2.6 million US\$ (Scenario 1), 1.285 million US\$ (Scenario 2) and 0.7 million US\$ (Scenario 3). The EB funds expected from the GPs are 0.65 m US\$, 0.321 m US\$ and 0.176 m US\$, respectively.

It is not clear whether the amount to be allocated from IAEA TC funds for the Scholarship Programme is in addition to the IAEA allocation to the RCA TC Programme, or whether it will be a part of the normal allocation for the RCA Programme. **If it is the latter, it will result in a drastic reduction in the funds available for the RCA TC programme.**

It is also not clear whether the allocation of EB funds by RCA GPs for the Scholarship Programme will result in a reduction of the EB funds available for the RCA TC Programme.

**Unless it is confirmed the allocation of funds for the Scholarship Programme will not result in a significant reduction of financial resources available for the RCA TC Programme, the approval of the implementation of the Scholarship Programme should be made only with the understanding that it will amount to an agreement to drastically reduce the number and the scope of future RCA TC projects.**

## **2. Link to RCA Vision and MTS**

The RCA Vision is to be “recognized as an effective partner in providing nuclear technologies that enhance socio-economic wellbeing and contribute to sustainable development in the region”. While well-developed human resources are a very important component for achieving this vision, development of human resources alone will not make it possible. The achievement of RCA vision also requires programmes and projects that would contribute to socio-economic development, implemented using the knowledge and skills developed through human resources development activities. Allocating a disproportionate amount of financial resources for human resources development will not make this possible.

The same can be said about the Strategic Directions of the RCA MTS. As stated in the Feasibility Study Report, the proposed Scholarship Programme will contribute to Strategic Direction 5 of the RCA MTS (Item 1 on page 4 and item 5 on page 8). The MTS contains 6 other Strategic Directions. Allocation of a disproportionate amount of financial resources to one Strategic Direction, will prevent the achievement of the rest.

## **3. Rationale for the Scholarship Programme**

The Feasibility Study Report assumes that RCA stakeholders who are trained in the numerous RCA Regional Training Courses do not have postgraduate qualifications. (Item 7 of the Executive Summary). This assumption should be validated.

Many of the RCA stakeholders (LCCs, NPCs and project team members) have post graduate qualifications in their respective areas of specialization, such as plant breeding, soil sciences, oncology, environmental studies, and engineering. RCA Regional Training Courses provide them training on specific nuclear techniques that can be applied in their areas of specialization.

Post graduate degrees in Nuclear Science and Technology would be required mostly by those who are employed by the National Nuclear Institutes. Producing a large number of postgraduates in Nuclear Science and Technology, not in proportion to the national nuclear programmes, could result in these graduates not being able to find employment

opportunities. A survey should be conducted to identify employment opportunities in RCA GPs for postgraduates in Nuclear Science and Technology.

#### **4. Contribution of graduates to the RCA Programme**

Being a member of the National Project Team is a key criterion that is used in selection of participants of RCA Regional Training Courses. This ensures the knowledge and skills they have acquired will be used in implementation of the respective RCA TC projects.

There is no guarantee of those who have obtained post graduate qualifications under this programme will contribute to future RCA projects or to the national nuclear programmes, since the award of scholarships are not linked to any RCA project or any future commitment to the national nuclear programmes.

#### **5. Human Resources for Nuclear Power Programmes**

Nuclear Power has been identified as one of the key areas for postgraduate studies under this programme. (Items 2 and 3 of page 88 and item 25 on page 11). Nuclear Power has not been an area for RCA projects in the past due to issues related to the Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty and is not a priority area identified in the RCA RPF for 2024/29.

Furthermore, there are numerous opportunities outside of the RCA programme to pursue postgraduate training related to nuclear power programmes, usually as a part of the contract with the supplier.

**A decision on whether Nuclear Power should be an area for future RCA activities would have to be made by RCA GPs, if postgraduate training on nuclear power (nuclear engineering) is to be provided.**

#### **6. Procedure for Project Development**

For more than 25 years, the responsibility of initiation and development of RCA Projects has been done by RCA GPs, exhibiting a high degree of ownership. RCA GPs have adopted a well-established procedure for project development, which is described in the RCA GOR.

Development of a TC project by the IAEA for implementation under the RCA Programme (item 81 on page 27) is a deviation from this procedure and **would require the approval of RCA GPs.**

#### **7. Provision of support for training within the country.**

The Feasibility Report envisages provision of scholarships for postgraduate students for degree programmes within their own countries. This undermines national commitment

and makes IAEA a financial donor rather than an agency transferring new technologies to its Member States.

The assumption that attractiveness of postgraduate studies in nuclear science and technology can be improved by providing financial support is also questionable. Selection of fields of studies by most students is governed by employment opportunities and their personal interests.

National nuclear institutes of many GPs provide support for new recruits to obtain postgraduate degrees, by providing tuition fees and granting study leave. This is a practice that can be followed by all RCA GPs.

The limited resources available can be used more productively by assisting RCA GPs to upgrade their existing postgraduate programmes and for establishing new PG degree programmes. TC resources allocated for national TC programmes and non-RCA regional projects also can be used for this purpose.

PAC supports the proposal to assist the new RCA GPs to develop their human resources, through a Fellowship programme. This should be a well-planned activity and a part of the national programmes for development of national nuclear institutes. National TC resources can be used for this purpose.

## **8. Feasibility of the Implementation Scheme**

The Feasibility Report contains information on the feasibility with a focus of financial mobilization for the Scholarship Programme. The feasibility of the actual implementation scheme (Appendix 3) through processing application documents, evaluating the applicants which includes conducting individual interviews, making decisions of awarding, arranging the payment of the awards, and monitoring progress of awardees should be considered: the analysis should include identification of financial and human-resource responsibilities for the implementation processes.

The Feasibility Report contains information on the availability of funds only for the three-year, pilot stage of the project. How the scholarship programme could be continued after the pilot stage should be made clear. The status of scholarships awarded at the beginning of the third year needs to be clarified if the programme cannot be continued after the pilot stage.

**PAC recommends the RCA GPs take the above factors into careful consideration in deciding on approving the implementation of the RCA Scholarship Programme.**