



COMMONWEALTH
SCHOLARSHIPS

Promoting research outputs and impact within the CSC's doctoral community

Alumni Advisory Panel Report
2019-2021 Panel



Executive Summary

The CSC's Alumni Advisory Panel provides a platform for Commonwealth Alumni to support the future of the programme and its Scholars by sharing personal insight and expertise to contribute to the development of CSC activities. Panel members are appointed for a two-year term and are expected to advise on at least one activity per year. The panel is comprised of 101 members.

The Taylor & Francis Commonwealth Scholar Best Journal Article Prize (BJAP) is an annual prize awarded to the Commonwealth Scholar or Alumni sole- or lead- author of the most outstanding article published in a recognised peer-review journal of high standing. Through the prize, the CSC and Taylor & Francis aim to encourage, promote, and reward the publication endeavours of Scholars who are completing, or alumni who have recently completed, their doctoral studies. The prize was introduced in 2012.

The prize comprises £1,500 and a year's personal subscription to a Taylor & Francis journal of the winner's choice. The prize is judged by a panel of current and former Commissioners.

Following a review of the prize and engagement over the last eight years, the CSC Alumni Team is keen to explore options to broaden this activity to include doctoral alumni at the early and mid-career researcher stages, as well as current Scholars, and provide participants and the CSC with an opportunity to promote the value and impact of Commonwealth Scholarship research to international development. Changes to the prize could include learning and development opportunities for participants which would seek to engage the CSC's doctoral community in sharing their research outputs and impact. Feedback will help assess proposed changes to the prize and better understand ways in which this activity could support Scholars and alumni in achieving and communicating research impact.

Methodology

Panel members were asked to complete an online survey consisting of multiple choice and open-ended qualitative questions. The questions asked were aimed to assess the proposed developments to BJAP, as well as understand alumni experiences as doctoral researchers and what further support could be of interest to the CSC's doctoral community.

As part of the review, the following documents were shared with participating panel members:

- Promoting outputs and impact- BJAP redevelopment proposal

The task was open to all panel members who were doctoral Commonwealth Scholars or have completed doctoral research. 19 registered to take part in the activity and 16 submitted feedback, a response rate of 84%.

Results

Key findings from the survey are summarised below under the following headings: Developing BJAP into a research impact award; Promoting research outputs and impact; and Your experiences as a researcher.

Developing BJAP into a research impact award

Previous participation in BJAP

Three respondents taking part in this activity were or had been eligible to take part in BJAP, however had not done so. For two respondents, the reasons for this were that they did not have eligible publications to enter at the time of their eligibility. The third respondent reported that they were not eligible to take part, highlighting the importance of clear communication and promotion of the activity, a common theme throughout later responses. Seven respondents were not eligible to take part having not completed CSC funded doctoral research. For the remaining six respondents, BJAP was not an opportunity at the time of their Scholarship.

Introduction of research streams

Part of the proposed developments to the current BJAP include the introduction of two research streams, designed to target Scholars and alumni at different stages in their research careers.

Research output stream

Asked to what extent respondents felt the research output stream was appropriately pitched to current Scholars and alumni 5-years post-thesis submission, the majority of respondents felt this was appropriately pitched. Reasons given included questions in this stream designed to understand the role of the Scholarship and research in moving the Scholar or alumnus' work

forward, which was felt to be appropriate at this career stage, and that the timeframe accommodated publication efforts while on award and re-adjustment time following completion of doctoral research. Respondents were generally positive about the engagement opportunity afforded by the stream and the emphasis on research amongst doctoral Scholars and alumni.

A couple of respondents felt the timeframe could be extended to allow greater time for publications, with one noting that publishing in a top journal may not be achievable during the early-career stage. One respondent highlighted that there was an overlap in questions between the two streams which could be revised to make clearer the distinction and expectations between the two. A couple of respondents queried whether book publications or chapters should be included, as well as conference proceedings, as more alumni within the five-year timeframe were likely to have these publications.

Research implementation and uptake stream

Respondents were asked to share comments on the appropriacy of the research implementation and uptake stream for alumni 5-10 years post-thesis submission.

The majority again felt this was appropriately pitched. Suggestions for further development included the addition of questions to understand changes in research focus from the doctoral research conducted as a Scholar and consideration for the factors behind this. A couple of respondents noted the timeframe could be extended.

For both research streams respondents commented that greater and clearer communication about this activity was needed to ensure Scholars and alumni are aware of the opportunity and to build engagement. One respondent suggested rotating the prize to focus on different disciplines and allow articles these articles to judged together to best evaluate the differences in research implementation across disciplines. Another respondent felt the make-up of the judging panel must be carefully considered for these same reasons. It was also noted that citations should be used as a factor in understanding research dissemination.

Regarding the broader effectiveness of introducing the two streams to encourage Scholars to share their research outputs with the CSC over a sustained period of time and demonstrate research progression, responses indicated the activity delivered on this. Comments included that it was an engaging and motivating opportunity for both Scholars and alumni and that it provided a mechanism for sustained engagement. One respondent noted that the two research streams provided opportunities for reflection on professional development, as participants would see developments in their outputs and applications over time. The importance of clear promotion and outputs was again stressed by respondents.

Increasing eligibility

The introduction of the research implementation and uptake stream will enable alumni 5-10 years post-thesis submission to take part in the prize for the first time while at this stage in their career. Respondents were asked in what ways, if any, they felt this activity would attract this group of alumni to take part.

It was generally believed alumni would want to take part as the activity would provide a further platform to promote and disseminate their research and potentially develop links between CSC doctoral researchers. Suggestions on further ways to engage this alumni group to share information on their research included direct surveys; conference, workshop and other event and speaker opportunities; and the submission of broader research outputs, such as policy reports and project outcomes for government and NGOs.

Promoting research outputs and impact

As well as developments to the BJAP competition, respondents were asked to share feedback on ways in which the research entries could be promoted and the introduction of opportunities for entrants themselves, beyond winning.

The report shared with respondents proposes new outputs for all entrants, including an online event or webinar(s) for winners and highly commended entrants to present on their research, and the publication of online articles showcasing research conducted by selected Scholar and alumni entrants, outlining its application to developmental needs and the CSC's six development themes. A further proposed output includes the development of a competitive research communication event or 'research slam'.

Respondents were asked to share feedback on each of the proposed outputs.

Online research impact event or webinar(s) for winners and highly commended

It was noted that online opportunities for winners and highly commended entrants provided further occasions to share and disseminate their work to a broad audience, as well as encourage and build opportunities for collaboration across the CSC community. A couple of respondents also felt this could be opened to research stakeholders and partners. One respondent noted that online events and webinars had become a crowded space and that consideration should be made to how this type of output is promoted and the target audience.

Online articles showcasing research conducted by selected Scholar and alumni entrants, outlining its application to developmental needs and the CSC's six development themes

Respondents agreed this output provided another opportunity for research dissemination and a wider platform and audience, although consideration should be given to the intended audience to ensure articles were correctly pitched. One respondent noted that creative ways of writing about research should be explored to help articles stand out and to differentiate from other similar CSC website content.

Research communication event or 'research slam'

A few respondents reported this output would appeal to Scholars and new alumni and provide an opportunity for research communication and discussion amongst peers. One respondent noted that it had a celebratory tone which would encourage participation. Considerations as to the audience were also raised to ensure management of expectations and takeaways from this

type of event. It was noted that training and support to address presentation and communication skills would be an important aspect.

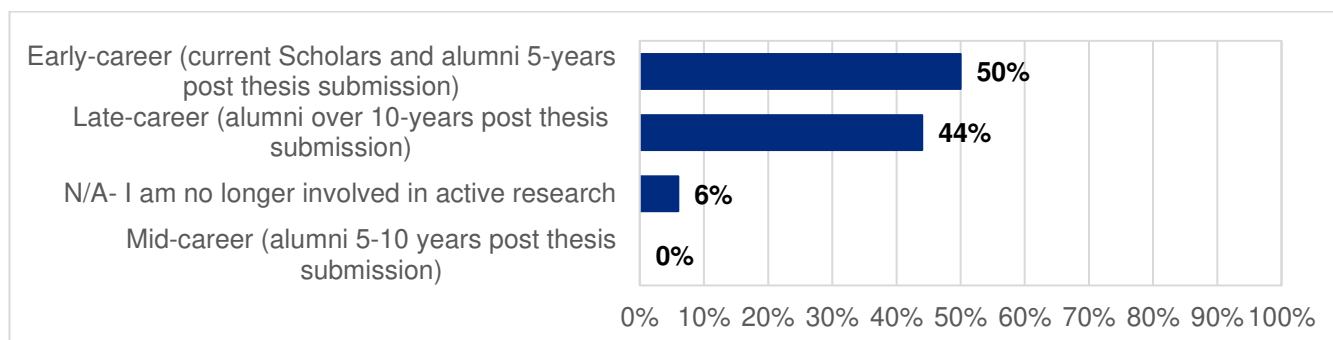
Asked as to the overall impact of the listed outputs in supporting the development of researcher skills, respondents noted the focus on communication skills would be most effective for participants, alongside opportunities for networking and collaboration through participation in activities and exposure.

Respondents were also asked to share ideas about other outputs or activities that could be both supportive and appealing to those eligible to apply for the prize to encourage participation. Suggestions included: support to deliver conference papers; discipline/field networking opportunities; leadership and advocacy training; access to larger, international research networks; peer networks and communities of practice; introduction of a CSC journal.

Your experiences as a researcher

The final part of the review asked respondents to share information on their experiences as a researcher to advise on further support that could be provided by the CSC, both through and outside the BJAP. Respondents were asked to report the current stage of their research career.

Figure 1 – Research career stage of panel respondents



n=16

Respondents were asked to reflect on their current research experiences and share information on activities or opportunities they have taken part in which have contributed to their development as a researcher.

Responses were similar across all research career stages. Opportunities to attend and present at workshops, seminars, and conferences were most common. Opportunities to peer review work was also mentioned by respondents, as well as journal and research editing experience.

Asked to reflect on what opportunities would have been useful as part of their development as researchers, respondents noted that mentoring and greater contact and collaboration with experienced researchers would have been beneficial, particularly at the early-career stage. Access to funding, grants, and research libraries was also shared by a few respondents, as well as fellowship opportunities for post-doctoral research.

Summary

Overall, feedback from members of the Alumni Advisory Panel on the proposed developments to the BJAP were positive, with many reporting that the changes to increase participation and create a new stream would be attractive to eligible alumni and help promote activities and outputs from the CSC community.

Areas for development identified include understanding the target audience for the proposed outputs, further refinement of differences between the two streams and timeframes, exploration of creative ways to share outputs (for example, written articles, use of multimedia outputs), and more visible and engaging promotion and communication of the activity to both those eligible and not eligible to take part.

Next steps

The Alumni Team will consider the feedback from members of the Alumni Advisory Panel to finalise the launch of the redeveloped BJAP in 2021 and plans for future expansion following the first year.

The feedback will be used to inform the following steps:

- Refinement of the two research streams and development of judging criteria.
- Working with CSC Communications Team, a communications strategy will be developed to better promote this activity, including website information, mailings to eligible Scholars and alumni, and online presence across all CSC channels.
- Ongoing development of proposed outputs to ensure clear audience, expectations, and takeaways.