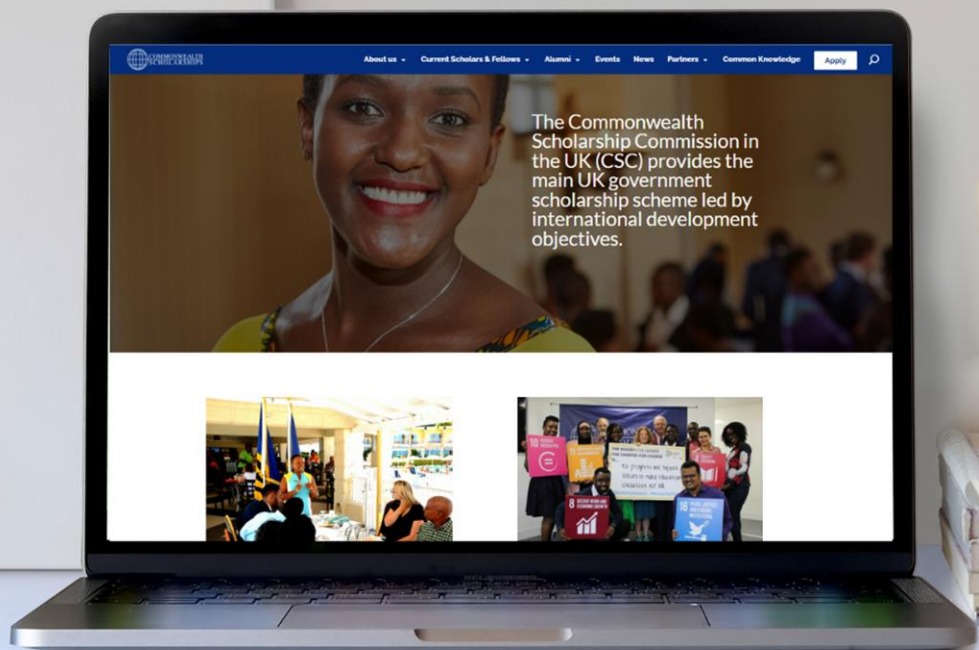




CSC Website Review

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.

In September 2020, the [CSC's website](#) was redeveloped to communicate more effectively the impact of Commonwealth Scholarships; improve functionality and navigation, making it easier for applicants and other users to find the information they require; optimise the site for use on mobile/tablet devices; enable better presentation of case studies and evaluation findings; and inform CSC stakeholders about our awards and impact.

Following the soft launch of the redeveloped website, the Alumni and Communications Teams invited feedback from panel members on the functionality and accessibility of the website, including comments on the user experience, navigability, presentation of content, and overall appearance. The feedback will be used to assess the changes made and incorporate any further developments to improve the user experience and the online presence of the CSC.

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 website design and presentation of content and test the accessibility and navigability, as well as gather more general information and feedback on the user experience.

Panel members were also invited to attend one of two focus group discussions to share their thoughts on and experiences of using the redeveloped CSC website.

The task was open to all panel members and 28 submitted feedback via the mechanisms above, a response rate of 28%. 6 panel members registered to take part in focus group discussion and 3 attended. Those who attended the focus group discussion also submitted feedback via the online survey.

Results

Key findings from the survey are summarised below under the following headings reflecting the two activities set within the review: Website design and content; and Testing accessibility and navigability.

Website design and content

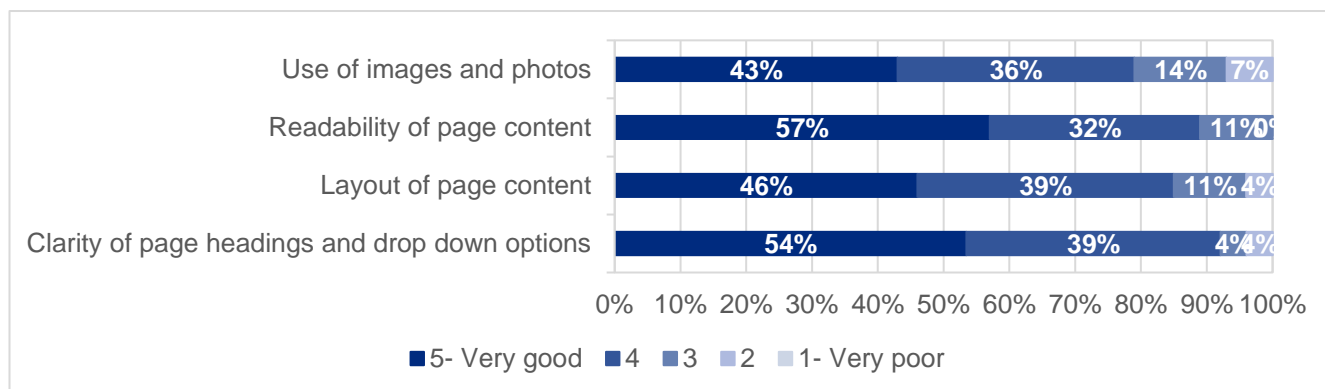
Feedback from the panel on their overall impression of the website was widely positive. Respondents reported that the new design was clear with uncluttered pages and that content was informative and well organised. It was also noted that the website was well structured, making it user friendly and easy to navigate. A few respondents commented on the use of images as appropriate and proportionate and that the colour palette was complimentary and consistent across pages.

Some respondents reported that the 'Apply' pages could be better integrated into the navigation headings making this button easier to find and that some images were blurred making it difficult to view these. One panellist shared that it would be useful to learn more about the history of the CSC on the website and its contributions to sustainable development through Scholarships and Fellowships.

Asked what respondents liked the most about the redeveloped website, popular responses included simplicity and clarity of information, section headings and ease of navigation, the use of images, consistent use of colour and the CSC brand. One respondent highlighted the 'News' section and the layout of news items, including the preview information. Another commented on the 'Events' page and the insight this afforded on CSC activities.

Respondents were asked to rate four aspects of the website between 1 and 5, where 1 is 'Very poor' and 5 is 'Very good'.

Figure 1 – Rating of aspects of the CSC website



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All four aspects received high scores, with most respondents selecting ‘Very good’ or ‘Good’. Respondents were asked to provide further details on ratings given.

In addition to the comments on the overall impression of the website which address these aspects, respondents noted that the redeveloped website offered more features, citing the online alumni update form as a new addition.

Regarding areas for possible improvement or development, a number of respondents felt the pages leaned themselves to clear and concise information, however some pages contained lengthy information which was not easy to read (for example, the main alumni page) and the layout of some pages made for unnecessary scrolling (for example, the website homepage). Splitting the events page to list past and future events separately was noted. A number of respondents highlighted ‘Spend over £500’, was a confusing heading and could be updated to better reflect the page content.

It was also felt that the integration of wider digital media, such as videos, would enhance user engagement with the site and information, as well as content demonstrating the impact of Commonwealth Scholars and Fellows. This included event reports, showcasing the work of alumni associations, and country-based activity amongst alumni.

While navigation received positive feedback, some respondents noted that certain pages were accessible from different parts of the website which was repetitive and at times confusing.

Presenting the objectives of the Commonwealth Scholarship Commission

As part of the review, respondents were asked to share in what ways, if any, they felt the redeveloped website effectively presents the objectives of Commonwealth Scholarship and Fellowships in supporting international development through access to higher education. In their responses, panel members were encouraged to suggest changes or developments to better present these objectives.

It was generally felt that the website effectively presents the objectives of Commonwealth Scholarships and Fellowships. Ways in which this was identified included the page outlining the CSC’s six development themes and their connection with the UN Sustainable Development

Goals (SDGs), the scope of development-focused activities across pages, and access to platforms for Scholars and alumni to connect across the CSC's development themes and development areas (for example, the Knowledge Hubs).

A number of respondents highlighted that stories on the work and impact of Scholars and alumni would further demonstrate the objectives of the CSC's awards and provide examples of the CSC's themes in practice. A couple of respondents shared that more awards and demographic data could be useful in reporting the scope of CSC awards and the CSC community.

Information on the CSC Alumni Network

Respondents were asked to share specific feedback on the information provided about the CSC Alumni Network and potential areas for development. It was noted to those completing the survey that stories demonstrating the impact of Commonwealth Alumni were under development, which was a common comment from respondents on areas for development throughout the survey.

Feedback on the alumni pages was positive, with a many respondents reporting that there was clear information on the network and available opportunities. Areas identified for possible development included reporting on the work and activities of alumni associations and providing a map to show the countries represented by Commonwealth Alumni and numbers. Some respondents felt that clearer information needed to be given about alumni activities, in particular the work of the Alumni Advisory Panel and Best Journal Article Prize, as well better encouragement for alumni to get involved in activities and volunteer to share their experiences and impact.

A couple of respondents noted that the Directory was no longer available and that a platform to share information and connect with alumni would be a useful resource.

Testing accessibility and navigability

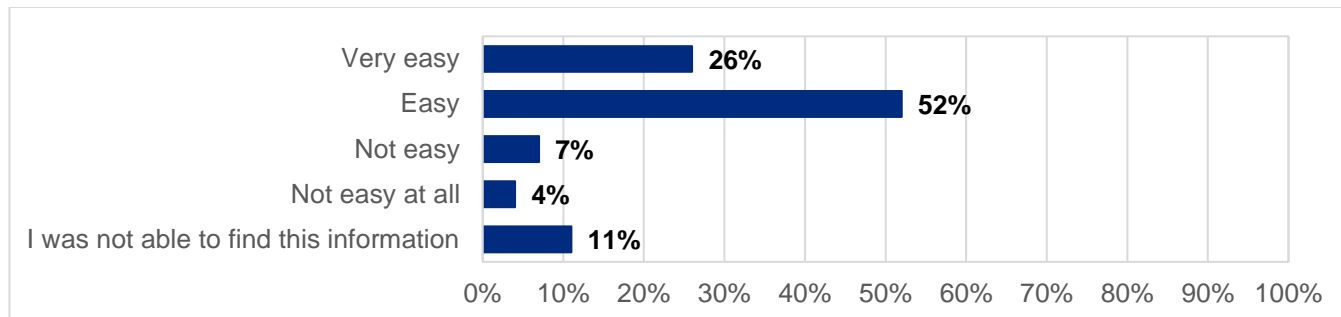
The second half of the website review asked respondents to test and feedback on the website accessibility and navigability. This included reporting on the country they accessed the website in, use of screen readers or other applications to access website content, and browser and device information. Respondents were also set two tasks to find information on the website and report back on the ease of this and any issues experienced. 27 respondents completed these tasks.

Respondents accessed the website in 13 countries using 9 types of web browser. Respondents accessed the website using mobile phones, desktop computers, laptops, and tablet devices. Only two respondents reported difficulties viewing the website, with one respondent reporting that text sizes varied across pages and the navigation bar when viewed on a mobile phone.

Navigation and user journey

Following initial feedback on accessing the website, respondents were asked to complete two tasks to test navigability and the user journey. In the first task, respondents were asked to find information on Commonwealth Scholarships and Fellowships available to citizens of Cameroon.

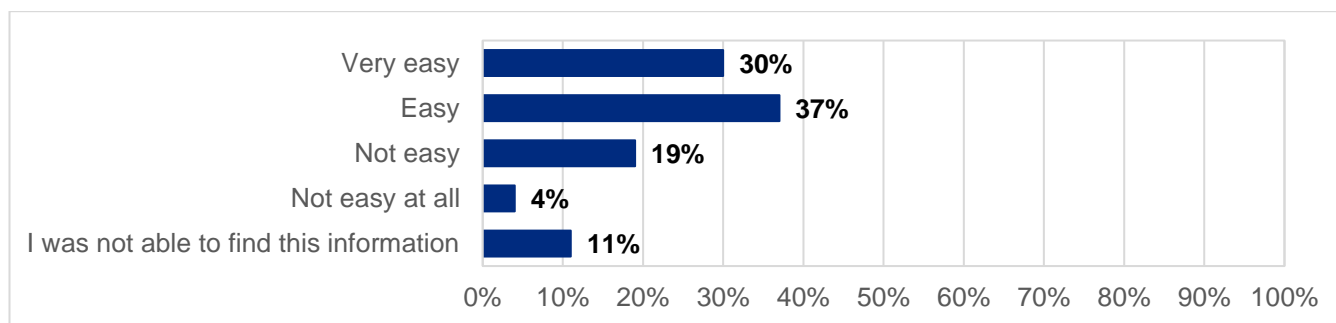
Figure 2 – Ease of identifying application information



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The second task asked respondents to find information about the CSC's six development themes.

Figure 3 – Ease of identifying the CSC's development themes



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The majority of respondents found it easy to navigate the website and find information on applications and the CSC's development themes. Feedback from those unable to find this information or who experienced difficulties reported accessing application information via the 'Partners' section of the website, rather than the 'Apply' pages. Two respondents felt that the headings used for 'Apply' and 'Development themes' were not clear for prospective applicants or those less familiar with the CSC.

Additional feedback from respondents on these two tasks noted that with applications currently closed, users found themselves in a webpage loop on trying to find out further information about Scholarships and Fellowships and when applications may open, which was an off-putting experience. It was also noted that the themes could be better demonstrated using impact stories and case studies.

As a final part to testing the accessibility and navigability of the website, respondents were asked to feedback on the overall layout of the website and pages. It was widely felt that the

layout was clear and that the headings used enabled easy navigation from the home page to further information.

Summary

Overall, feedback from members of the Alumni Advisory Panel on the redeveloped was positive, with many reporting that the changes to the layout and content made the website easy to use, well organised, and fresh looking. Regarding navigability, the majority of respondents found it easy to use the navigation bar to find information and that information was presented logically.

Areas for development identified included navigation across the 'Apply' pages, more impact stories and case studies from Commonwealth Scholars and Alumni, wider use of digital media as part of the website, and data visualisation as a possible means of presenting information about the impact of the CSC. One respondent noted that captions and transcripts for existing video content was not clearly available and should be made more accessible.

Next steps

The Alumni and Communications Team will consider the feedback from members of the Alumni Advisory Panel as part of ongoing work and future developments for the CSC website.

The feedback will be used to inform the following steps:

- Agreement on website priorities for the next calendar year, including assessment of immediate changes based on urgency and those which can be made internally by the Communications Team.
- Immediate changes will include page headings and wording/content updates and device compatibility. Changes requiring longer-term planning or which are less urgent include a review of the homepage layout and publication of impact stories, as well as possible data visualisation outputs.
- Ongoing consultation with CSC teams responsible for content to review feedback from the panel and identify developments to be undertaken.