COMMONWEALTH SCHOLARSHIPS

Expanding Horizons:
The Commonwealth Distance Learning Scholarship Programme

Full Report

Table of Contents

Executive Summary

Commonwealth Distance Learning Scholarships were established in 2001 as part of an initiative designed to expand the modes of scholarships offered by the Commonwealth Scholarship Commission in the UK (CSC). To date, it has funded 3,793 Scholars from 41 Commonwealth countries to study Master's programmes at 45 different higher education institutions in the United Kingdom. The objective of the programme is to 'contribute to the development needs of Commonwealth countries by providing training for skilled and qualified professionals in key development areas'.[1]

It is intended to benefit 'high-quality postgraduate students who wish to access training not available in their home countries, who wish or need to remain in their home country while they study, and who have the potential to enhance the development of their home countries with the knowledge and leadership skills they acquire.'[2] In addition to meeting the academic or professional qualification requirements, Scholars should also be unable to afford to undertake the programme of study without the Scholarship.[3]

In addition to the mode of learning, the programme has several unique features that distinguish it from other Commonwealth Scholarships. **The first is that Scholars can conduct their studies part-time, allowing them to continue with their employment or other responsibilities** over the course of their Scholarship. The ability to continue working is of particular importance as this allows Scholars to immediately and **directly apply what they learn from their coursework to their workplace environment**. A second feature, which follows on from the ability to study part-time, is that funding is available for up to five years, allowing Scholars to determine the pace of their studies. A third unique aspect of the programme is that Scholars have the option to exit their studies early while still gaining a qualification at the Postgraduate Certificate or Diploma level.

The Scholarship also has distinctive characteristics relating to the university Providers, including a requirement that universities first apply to be awarded Scholarship places in specific programmes prior to the recruitment of Scholars. Many university Providers also choose to **operate the programmes in collaboration with an international Partner organisation located outside of the United Kingdom**. These international Partners add value by contributing their own expertise to the programme, helping to promote Scholarship opportunities in their own communities, and running face-to-face summer schools.

This report is the product of an evaluation conducted by the CSC to examine the experiences of the main stakeholders of the programme (Scholars, university Providers, Partner organisations, and Scholars' Employers), as well as the outcomes and impact realised by Alumni in the years following their Scholarship. It is based on existing survey data, routinely collected by the CSC as a part of its evaluation programme, as well as data collected through a set of surveys specifically conducted to collect information from Partners and Employers. Key informant interviews were also conducted with all categories of stakeholder to validate the survey findings and inform a series of case studies that are included in the full report. In addition to examining the experiences and

---

[1] Commonwealth Scholarship Commission, 'Commonwealth Distance Learning Scholarships', cscuk.fcdo.gov.uk/scholarships/commonwealth-distance-learning-scholarships/ Last accessed 19 July 2022.
[2] Ibid.
[3] Ibid.

outcomes associated with the programme, the evaluation sought to address several specific research questions based around the following themes:

- The impact of Commonwealth Distance Learning Scholars on their programmes of study and in their workplaces.

- Engagement of Commonwealth Distance Learning Scholars with broader CSC engagement activities.

- The benefits and characteristics of the relationships between university Providers and Partner organisations.

- Investigating demographic trends in recruitment.

The key findings from this evaluation, examining the experiences of all key stakeholders, and the overall outcomes and impact of the Commonwealth Distance Learning Scholarships are outlined below.

Scholar Experiences

The top motivations reported by Commonwealth Distance Learning Scholars for applying to the programme are that they wanted to apply for a higher education scholarship, they wanted to apply to their specific programme of study, they wanted to continue working during their studies, and that they wanted to apply specifically for a Commonwealth Scholarship. **As a result of their Distance Learning courses, most Scholars reported substantial change in their knowledge and skills across a variety of academic and professional areas, including critical thinking, research techniques, ethical sensitivity, capacity to disseminate knowledge, and technical skills.** In fact, Scholars almost universally reported some degree of change across every knowledge or skill category.

The vast majority of Commonwealth Distance Learning Scholars continue to be employed during their studies, with most maintaining full-time employment. Given that one of the unique features of the Commonwealth Distance Learning programme is that it allows Scholars to study part-time so that they can continue their employment concurrently, the programme is achieving this goal. While the plurality of Scholars indicated that they are employed in the Public sector, there is also strong representation from Scholars working in the NGO, Private, and Academic sectors.

Furthermore, almost all Scholars frequently use knowledge or skills from their studies in their employment, in their problem-solving techniques, and outside of their employment. Scholars also reported teaching what they had learned to their co-workers either through formal or informal training. Most Scholars additionally reported that they were working to promote change within their organisation based on what they were learning either though modifications to their own working practice, or by advocating changes with their senior managers.

Just under one-third of Commonwealth Distance Learning Scholars reported that they worked or otherwise engaged with other Commonwealth Scholars, Fellows, and Alumni, demonstrating some of the collaborations that occur within the CSC community. Most engagement that did occur was professional in nature, either through cross-organisational work, co-operation, or knowledge sharing, or by collaborating with co-workers who were also members of the CSC community. In some cases, respondents reported collaborative activities that were working towards developmental impact such as community education projects or advocacy. Respondents also

reported that they had formed study or support groups with other Commonwealth Scholars in their programme in order to further their studies.

Employer Perspectives

Employers had overwhelmingly positive expectations for their employee's take up of a Commonwealth Distance Learning Scholarship. While some Employers had generally positive expectations, others cited specific expectations including an increase in their Scholar's knowledge and skills, improvements in the performance of their organisation, and knowledge sharing from the Scholar to other members of staff. **All Employers confirmed that their expectations had been positively met**, with a few indicating that their expectations had been exceeded.

Supporting the self-assessment provided by Scholars, Employers reported that they had observed significant changes in their Scholar's knowledge and skills, including research techniques, knowledge of research in their field, and general technical skills, as well as soft skills such as critical thinking, leadership skills, and ability to disseminate knowledge. **Employers also reported that they observed their Scholar frequently applying what they were learning from their Scholarship in their work,** sharing that knowledge with their colleagues, as well as making or advocating for changes in their workplace based on their studies. These assessments provide strong evidence that the Scholarship is having a positive impact on both the knowledge base of staff and the overall operation of Scholars' workplaces. This is further evidenced by the examples of change within the workplace detailed by Employers, including the implementation of new policies and practices, and the development of new organisational work strands. These outcomes were all cited by Employers as major benefits that their organisations had derived from their employee's Commonwealth Distance Learning Scholarship.

Approximately one-third of Employers indicated that their organisation had **formed new relationships with other organisations because of the Commonwealth Distance Learning programme**, including new international relationships with universities and multilateral bodies. Half of Employers also indicated that the programme had helped them to strengthen existing relationships with universities and multilateral bodies, as well as private companies and local and national organisations.

Employers largely indicated that they did not face significant challenges due to their employee's Scholarship. In the few instances where challenges were mentioned, these generally revolved around the need for their Scholar to manage their workload alongside their studies, however Employers were happy to accommodate their employees in these cases and noted that the Scholar's study programme reciprocated this when their obligations at work required flexibility. In rare cases Employers flagged a lack of resourcing available to implement the changes that their Scholar was advocating for, or a lack of buy-in from other employees in taking up those changes.

On the whole, **Employers had very positive perceptions of Commonwealth Scholarships and Fellowships, strongly agreeing that they were prestigious, relevant to the needs of their countries, and valued by employers.** Notably, every Employer who participated in the survey said that they would recommend applying for a Commonwealth Scholarship or Fellowship to others.

Provider Perspectives

University Providers identified many benefits that Commonwealth Distance Learning Scholars receive through their programmes of study. Chief among these is the high degree of expertise that Scholars can access from their lecturers, and the quality of the education that Scholars receive through their programme. Additionally, Providers highlighted the unique and leading-edge nature of the programmes offered to Distance Learners, with many of these being at the forefront of their respective fields. Providers also highlighted the long-term benefit that the prestige of an education and accreditation from their universities offered to Scholars. The development of soft skills and international networks were also flagged by Providers as important benefits of the programme. In addition to the substantial benefits enjoyed by Scholars, University Providers recognised the benefits that they and their programmes derived through the presence of Commonwealth Distance Learning Scholars. First and foremost was the **variety of experience that Scholars brought into their classrooms, sharing insights into the country contexts in which they have worked with other students on their courses**.

Providers also cited the value of the wide geographic representation and multicultural experience that the Commonwealth Scholars brought to their programmes, providing greater international breadth and experience to group discussions. This benefit is also expressed through the broader international networks established through the courses. Finally, in some instances the funding and students that Providers are able to access through the Scholarships meant that their courses became viable to run for other non-Commonwealth students both practically and financially.

Partner Perspectives

Partner organisations, who engage with Scholars in their home countries over the course of their studies, generally echoed the benefits to Scholars that were cited by university Providers, although from a more practical perspective. Partners emphasised the **additional opportunities for practical training that Scholars received through their study programmes, including research and fieldwork experience** that is facilitated by the Partner organisations.

Both Partner organisations and university Providers cited a number of mutual benefits that their institutions derived from their partnership to deliver their Distance Learning programmes. These benefits include knowledge exchange, the opportunity for collaboration, the sharing of mutual goals, and the prestige of association with Commonwealth Scholarships. University Providers also cited the ability to access local knowledge, to host face-to-face sessions, and assistance with recruitment efforts as benefits that they received from these partnerships, while Partner organisations separately cited the ability to establish and strengthen international partnerships, the sharing of expertise between staff, and the ability to secure scholarship funding for local students as benefits. All university Providers and Partner organisations indicated positive professional relationships, with little in the way of challenges. In the instances where challenges were identified, they were not related to the partnerships themselves, but were instead focused on the impact that COVID-19 has had on the Partner organisations due to local conditions and their involvement in pandemic response. Many Providers and Partners indicated that their partnership has strengthened, expanded, and evolved over time.

Alumni Outcomes and Impact

Following their completion of the Scholarship, Commonwealth Distance Learning Alumni reported significant impact across a wide range of development areas, and at various levels. Alumni continued to have an impact at the Institutional and Local levels, with the proportion reporting impact at these levels remaining consistently high from pre- to post-Scholarship and across all follow-up survey intervals. Alumni generally reported **increasing impact at the National and International levels over time post-Scholarship**.

The proportion of Alumni reporting impact in Social Development remained consistently high across all post-Scholarship survey intervals, with most Alumni also reporting stable levels of impact with respect to Civic Engagement. Alumni reported having an impact in Economic Development at a rate consistently higher than pre-Scholarship and that trended upwards across all post-Scholarship surveys, while they also reported **significantly increased rates of involvement in Policymaking** in the initial post-Scholarship survey, and this continued to stay well above the pre-Scholarship rate in all subsequent surveys.

There was a **strong disposition towards the health sector**, with more than half of Alumni reporting that their work contributed towards SDG 3 (Good Health and Well-Being). Additionally, approximately one-quarter of Alumni reported that they were contributing to SDG 4 (Quality Education), SDG 5 (Gender Equality), and SDG 1 (No Poverty). These areas of focus were also reflected in Alumni descriptions of their work and development impact.

Significant proportions of Alumni provided details of impact that fit under the themes of 'Health', 'Policy', 'Economic', 'Education', and 'Community', with their work often overlapping across multiple themes. Other themes that were mentioned include 'Women', 'Children', 'Government', 'Agriculture', 'Equity and Access' and 'Environmental'. While the impact examples provided in this review help to demonstrate the breadth and depth of the work of Commonwealth Distance Learning Alumni, this offers only a small glimpse into the wider impact they are having on the lives of individuals, communities and across their professional fields.

Summary

Overall, this evaluation has found that the Commonwealth Distance Learning Scholarship programme provides an opportunity for individuals to participate in postgraduate studies with institutions based in the United Kingdom that otherwise would not have been possible, with many Scholars emphasising the importance of being able continue working while undertaking their studies.

Scholars and Alumni report substantial gains across all knowledge and skill areas, and consistently apply what they have learned in their work both during and after their studies. Employers of current Scholars reiterated these observations and noted that their employee's Scholarship had broader organisational impacts through the Scholar's imparting of knowledge to co-workers and the implementation of new policies and practices, leading to overall improvements in the performance of their organisation. Employers also reported that the Scholarship enabled them to either form new relationships with other organisations or strengthen existing relationships.

University Providers highlight the distinct benefits enjoyed by Scholars participating in the programme, including access to a high quality and prestigious education, while simultaneously recognising that the programme itself benefits through the Scholars' presence and the contribution

of their unique international perspectives. Both university Providers and their local Partner organisations emphasised that they benefitted substantially from the collaboration and knowledge exchange enjoyed through their partnership, and that this was strengthened through their joint delivery of the Commonwealth Distance Learning programme. Furthermore, Partners flagged the added value of these partnerships for Scholars, who benefitted from the practical experience and opportunities for face-to-face engagement offered by Partner organisations.

Beyond the immediate outcomes of the programme, Alumni report broader and longer-term impact, indicating that their work contributes to at least one of Social Development, Civic Engagement, Economic Development, or Policymaking across a variety of development areas. Given that thousands of Commonwealth Distance Learning Scholars have been funded by the programme to date, the substantial acquisition of knowledge and skills, the application and sharing of these knowledge and skills both during and after their studies, the international networks created and strengthened, and the work that Alumni go on to do in international development, it is clear that the Commonwealth Distance Learning programme provides high value for all of the programme's stakeholders, and has a significant impact on the participants, their organisations, and their communities.

Introduction

Commonwealth Distance Learning Scholarships were introduced in 2001 as a part of an initiative designed to expand the modes of scholarships offered by the Commonwealth Scholarship Commission in the UK (CSC). The initial objectives of the programme were to select quality courses of study that had clear international development objectives and worked with partner organisations outside of the United Kingdom.[4] To that end, the Commission selected four existing distance learning courses that fit these principles from UK institutions with track records in delivering distance learning to make up the programme's first cohort in 2002.[5] The programme was formally launched on 30 July 2002 at the second Pan-Commonwealth Forum on Open Learning in Durban by representatives of the CSC to promote awareness of this new development across the sector.

The first cohort was comprised of 84 Scholars, and since then the programme has grown to fund 3,793 Scholars from 41 Commonwealth countries between 2002-2021. Currently, the objective of the programme is to 'contribute to the development needs of Commonwealth countries by providing training for skilled and qualified professionals in key development areas'.[6] It is intended to benefit 'high-quality postgraduate students who wish to access training not available in their home countries, who wish or need to remain in their home country while they study, and who have the potential to enhance the development of their home countries with the knowledge and leadership skills they acquire.'[7] Scholars must be a Commonwealth citizen or hold refugee status in a Commonwealth country, as well as be currently resident in one of 21 least developed, low, and lower middle-income Commonwealth countries. Furthermore, in addition to academic or professional experience qualifications they should also be unable to afford to study the programme without the Scholarship.[8]

The Commonwealth Distance Learning Scholarship is currently one of a handful of scholarships available for students to study for a Master's degree internationally through distance learning, making it fairly unique within the landscape of international mobility scholarships, particularly given its focus on international development. In addition to the distinct mode of learning, the selection process of the Commonwealth Distance Learning programme is different to other Commonwealth Scholarships. Scholarships are initially allocated by the Commission to UK-based distance learning programmes that applied to offer Commonwealth Distance Learning Scholarship places on their programmes. These Provider institutions then advertise these opportunities as they see fit through their contacts, institutional networks, and marketing channels. The university Providers then shortlist the top applications that they receive, and the ranked shortlist is then submitted to the Commission for review and final signoff.

---

[4] Commonwealth Scholarship Commission, 'CSC 2002/12 Agendum 6.1 Commonwealth Scholarships by Distance Learning', 2 July 2002.
[5] Ibid. The initial courses were Agricultural Science at Imperial College, Computer Based Information Systems at the University of Sunderland, Water and Waste Engineering/Water and Environmental Management at the University of Loughborough, and Renewable Energy Systems Technology at the University of Loughborough.
[6] Commonwealth Scholarship Commission, 'Commonwealth Distance Learning Scholarships', cscuk.fcdo.gov.uk/scholarships/commonwealth-distance-learning-scholarships/ Last accessed 19 July 2022.
[7] Ibid.
[8] Ibid.

While not a requirement, many of the university Providers operate in partnership with another Partner organisation located outside of the United Kingdom, which contribute their own expertise to the programme, help promote Scholarship opportunities in their own community, and run face-to-face summer schools for both Scholars and other students in their cohorts.[9]

The programme has a number of additional unique features that distinguishes it from other Commonwealth Scholarships including those offered for UK-based Master's study. The first is that Scholars can conduct their studies part-time, allowing them to continue with their employment or other responsibilities over the course of their Scholarship. The ability to continue working is of particular importance as this allows Scholars to immediately and directly apply what they learn from their coursework to their workplace environment, a major distinguishing feature of the Scholarship. The second feature, related to Scholars' option to study part-time, is that funding is available for up to five years rather than the one year typical for Master's study. A third feature of the programme is that Scholars have the option to exit the programme early prior to earning their Master's degree while still gaining a qualification, be it a Postgraduate Certificate or Diploma.

With 2021 marking the twentieth cohort of Scholars beginning their studies, and the increased importance of online and distance learning on a global scale, the CSC has undertaken an in-depth evaluation of the Commonwealth Distance Learning programme. This report explores the findings of the evaluation, organised by the different categories of stakeholders involved in the programme.

The rest of this section provides a summary of the research questions and data sources used in the evaluation. Section 1 contains general details about the Commonwealth Distance Learning programme overall, as well as a demographic breakdown of those who have been awarded Scholarships and their motivations for applying. Section 2 explores the experiences of Scholars while they are studying, particularly how they apply their learnings in the workplace and their sense of identity as a Commonwealth Scholar. Section 3 also examines how Scholars apply their learnings in the workplace, but from the perspective of their Employers. It also contains Employers' observations about the wider effects that their employee's Scholarship has had on their organisations. Section 4 turns to the perspectives of both the university Providers and their Partner organisations in their delivery of the Commonwealth Distance Learning programme. Section 5 explores outcomes for Alumni of the programme, examining how the Scholarship has affected them after the completion of their studies, while Section 6 specifically looks at the developmental impact of Alumni activities, the principal long-term goal of Commonwealth Scholarships.

There are four case studies interspersed throughout the report that explore the experiences of clusters of Scholars, Employers, university Providers, and Partners, all associated with specific Commonwealth Distance Learning programmes of study. These case studies appear between sections of the report from the end of Section 2 onwards.

Research Questions and Data Sources

In addition to assessing the overall outcomes and impact of the Distance Learning programme, this evaluation also sought to answer several research questions about the programme and its stakeholders. The specific stakeholders of interest were:

- Current Scholars (Scholars)

---

[9] The role of Partner organisations is explored further in Section 4.

- Employers of current Scholars (Employers)

- University Providers of programmes of study (Providers)

- Partner organisations that some university Providers work with to deliver the programme (Partners)

Alumni outcomes were also of interest, although there were no research questions related to Alumni nor bespoke data collection conducted with them.

The information contained within this report comes from multiple sources, specifically:

- CSC award data, 2002-2021.

- Annual surveys with current Distance Learning Scholars (Distance Learning Scholar Survey), 2017-2021.

- A survey of Employers of current Distance Learning Scholars (Employer Survey)

- A survey of university Providers (Provider Survey)

- A survey of Partner organisations (Partner Survey)

- Annual Longitudinal Surveys, which include both a pre-Scholarship Baseline survey, and a post-Scholarship Alumni survey, 2016-2020.

- Key informant interviews with stakeholders.

The Employer, Provider, and Partner surveys were all bespoke surveys administered specifically to inform this evaluation. However, the annual Distance Learning Scholar Survey and the annual Longitudinal Surveys (Baseline and Alumni) are routinely administered every year as a part of the CSC's Evaluation and Monitoring programme. The Distance Learning Scholar Survey has been administered every year since 2017 to collect data on Scholar's activities during their Scholarship, while the Longitudinal surveys have been administered each year since 2016 to collect a robust data set that can be used to assess the impact of all Commonwealth Scholarship programmes. The data used for this report was the full subset of data that was provided by Scholars and Alumni of the Commonwealth Distance Learning programme. Sources and number of respondents are noted under graphs throughout the report. All data was analysed using either descriptive statistics or free text coding and thematic analysis as appropriate.

Some research questions were specific to particular stakeholders, while others cut across multiple groups. The rest of this section summarises both the research questions that were relevant to each stakeholder type, as well as the data used when discussing those stakeholders.

Scholar and Alumni Data

There are two primary sources of data with respect to the Distance Learning Scholars, the CSC's award database, and the Annual Distance Learning Scholar survey. The 2021 version of this survey also contained a number of additional questions that were appended to the regular version specifically to collect data to answer Scholar-related research questions for this evaluation.

The research questions specific to Distance Learning Scholars included:

- What are Scholars' motivations for applying to this particular programme?

- What are the points of contact that Scholars have with the CSC?

- What kind of participation do Distance Learners have with CSC engagement opportunities?

- To what degree do Distance Learning Scholars and Alumni identify as CSC Scholars and Alumni?

- What is the impact that Scholars have on their workplaces while studying?

- Why do a minority of Scholars opt to exit their programme before reaching full accreditation?

In addition to the data collected in the Annual Distance Learning Survey, four Scholars were interviewed in order to explore their experience with the programme in greater depth, and to better understand their relationships with the other stakeholders.

Pre-Scholarship Baseline and post-Scholarship Alumni data is sourced from the CSC's Longitudinal Survey programme. These annual surveys collect data from incoming Scholars in a pre-Scholarship Baseline survey, and then across five post-Scholarship Alumni surveys issued every two years upon completion of the Scholarship.

Provider Data

University Providers are asked to complete an annual report to update the CSC on the progress of Scholars through their programme. In 2021 this report was appended with a short set of survey questions designed to collect data addressing research questions that were specifically relevant to this stakeholder. Specifically:

- How does the presence of CSC Scholars affect other students on their programme?

- What added value to the Scholarship is brought by the UK Provider?

- What kinds of variations exist in the programme designs of providers (summer schools, cohorting, programme length)? What effect does this have on Scholars?

- How can the qualifications reporting process be improved?

- Why is there an imbalance in the gender of Scholars who are male?

- Why are there a disproportionate number of Scholars from Sub-Saharan Africa?

Additionally, as the CSC does not have direct contact with the Partner organisations, in the instances where university Providers did work with a Partner organisation, they were asked to provide the contact details for their main contact so that they could be invited to participate in the Partner survey.

As was the case with the Scholars, four Provider contacts were interviewed to explore their experiences with the programme, and the relationships that they have with the other stakeholders. These interviews were also conducted to build the multi-stakeholder case studies that are included throughout this report.

Partner Data

The Partner organisations for which the CSC received contact information were invited to participate in a survey about their experiences with the Commonwealth Distance Learning programme. Seven contacts were invited to participate (from six Partner organisations), and three contacts completed the survey providing some insight into the Partner experience. The research questions that this survey sought to answer were:

- What are the benefits of the partnerships between Distance Learning Providers and their Partners?

- What is the character of these relationships?

- How do these relationships change over time?

- Does the partnership contribute to institutional development at the Partner organisation?

Two Partner contacts were also interviewed in order to explore their experience with the programme, and the relationships that they have with the other stakeholders. These interviews were also conducted to build the multi-stakeholder case studies that are included throughout this report.

Employer Data

Scholars were asked at the end of their survey whether they would be willing to share the details of their Employer in order for the CSC to contact them about their experiences with the programme. In total, 64 Scholars provided contact details for their Employers, and 17 Employers completed the survey providing observations on the impact in their workplace that occurred as a result of their staff's involvement in the Commonwealth Distance Learning programme.

The research questions that the survey sought to answer were:

- What is the impact that Scholars have on their workplaces while studying?

- What is the impact of Scholars and Alumni being clustered together by institution or local sector?

Two Employers were also interviewed, and their perspectives helped to enrich the multi-stakeholder case studies.

The next Section provides an overview of the Commonwealth Distance Learning programme, exploring the demographics of the scheme and the types of courses that have been offered.

Section 1 – Programme Details and Scholar Profile

This section provides a brief overview of the Commonwealth Distance Learning programme itself, along with some basic demographic information about Distance Learning Scholars, and their employment backgrounds. It also examines the different motivations that Scholars have cited for applying for a Commonwealth Distance learning Scholarship.

Programme Figures

The Commonwealth Distance Learning programme was initiated in 2002 with its first cohort of 84 Scholars. While the number of Scholars each year has varied over the two decades since, the overall trajectory of the programme has been one of expansion, growing from an average of 138 Scholars in the first five years of the programme to an average of 226 Scholars in the five most recent years.

Figure 1.1 – Number of Scholarships awarded by year[10]
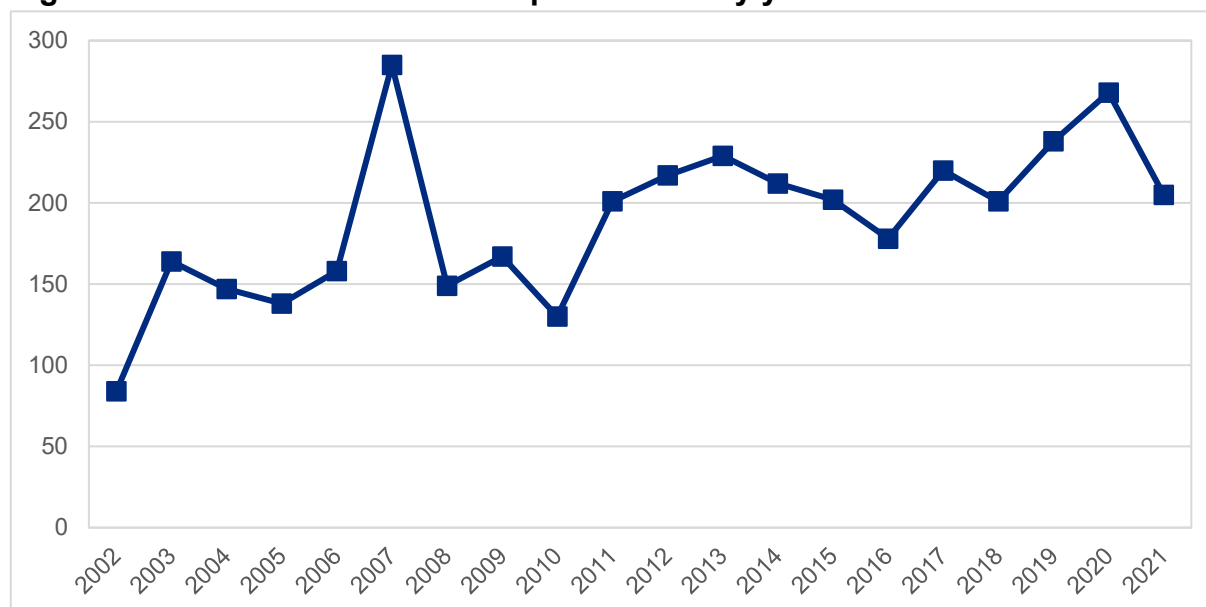
Source: CSC award data.

As outlined in the Introduction, one of the defining features of the Commonwealth Distance Learning programme is the role of the UK higher education institutions throughout the entire process, beginning with the initial application round, in which a set number of Scholarship places are allocated to specific study programmes. This takes place prior to the recruitment of the Scholars themselves. As of 2021, 45 institutions have been awarded Commonwealth Distance Learning Scholarships, representing all regions of the United Kingdom. Figure 1.2 below shows the top fifteen institutions by number of Scholarship places filled to date. These figures include institutions that have had successful applications for multiple programmes of study within individual years, as well as individual programmes that have successfully applied across multiple years.

---

[10] Note that the 2007 award year included an additional one-off tranche of funding for Distance Learning Scholarships.

Figure 1.2 – Top Provider institutions by total number of Scholarships allocated[11]

Institution	Scholarships
University of Edinburgh	337
Leeds Beckett University	251
The Open University	236
University of Stirling	185
UCL Institute of Education	184
London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine	175
London South Bank University	160
University of Southampton	150
University of York	140
Bangor University	136
University of Dundee	135
University of Sunderland	135
Imperial College London at Wye	134
Staffordshire University	129
Cardiff University	123

Source: CSC award data.

Of the specific programmes that have received CSC funding, approximately three-fifths (57%) fall under the umbrella of 'STEM and Medicine' while the remaining two-fifths (43%) can be identified as 'Social Sciences and Education' programmes. Figure 1.3 identifies the fifteen programmes of study that have received the most Scholarship places to date, as well as the institution at which they are based.

---

[11] Note a full list is available in Appendix 1.

Figure 1.3 – Top programmes by total number of Scholarships allocated[12]
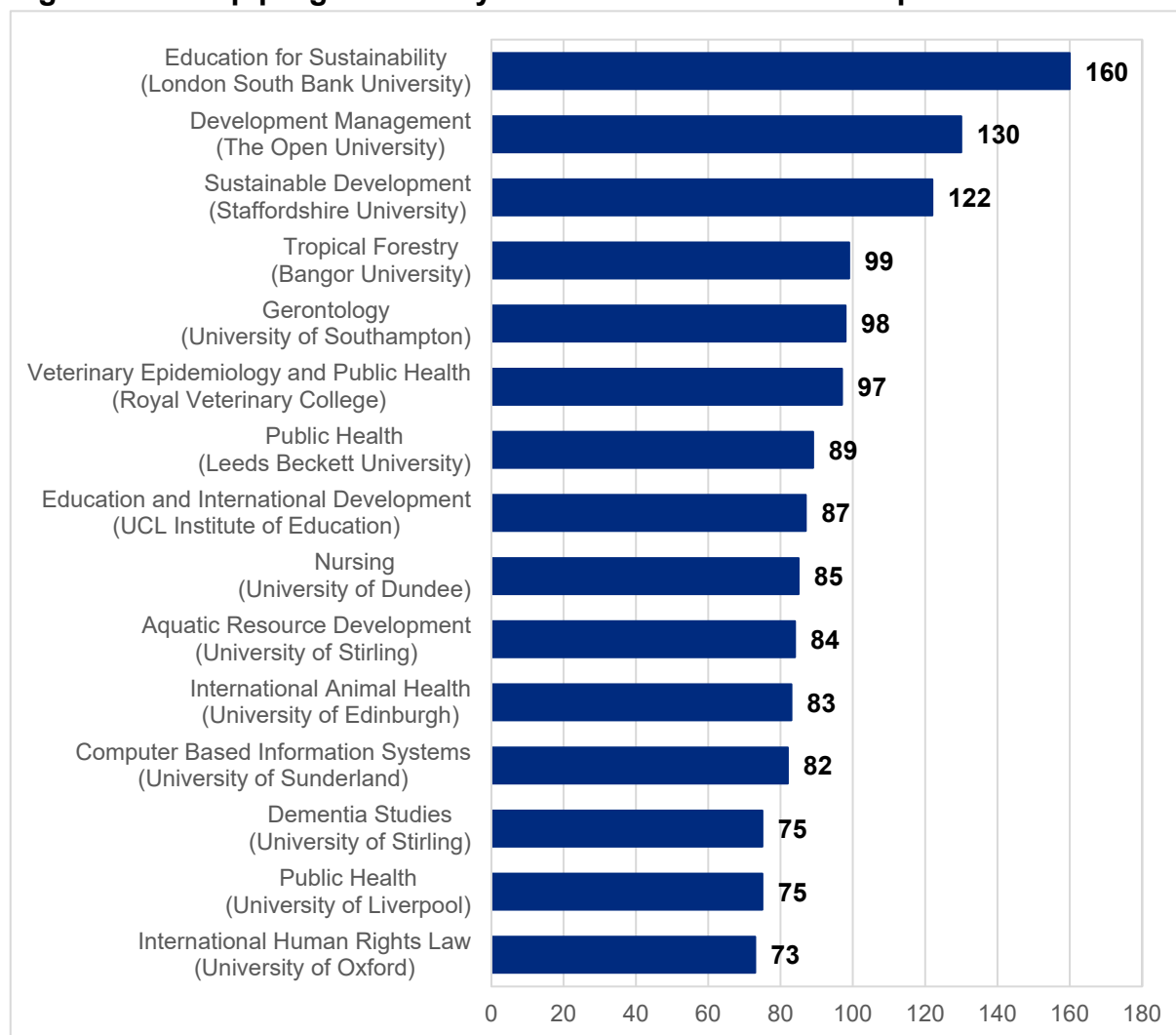
Source: CSC award data.

The next section looks at the demographics of individuals who have received Commonwealth Distance Learning Scholarships.

Scholar Demographics

As mentioned in the Introduction, the Commonwealth Distance Learning programme is intended to benefit 'high-quality postgraduate students who wish to access training not available in their home countries, who wish or need to remain in their home country while they study, and who have the potential to enhance the development of their home countries with the knowledge and leadership skills they acquire.'[13]

Currently the programme is available to students from 24 different Commonwealth countries, but over the life of the programme Scholars have come from 41 Commonwealth countries in total. The ten most frequent recipient countries are listed below in Figure 1.4 and Scholars from these countries collectively make up over four-fifths (83%) or 3,135 of all Distance Learning Scholars to date.

---

[12] Note a full list is available in Appendix 2.
[13] Commonwealth Scholarship Commission, 'Commonwealth Distance Learning Scholarships', cscuk.fcdo.gov.uk/scholarships/commonwealth-distance-learning-scholarships/ Last accessed 19 July 2022.

Figure 1.4 – Top ten countries by proportion of Scholars

Country	Percentage
Kenya	19%
Uganda	13%
Nigeria	11%
India	10%
Zambia	7%
Ghana	6%
Tanzania	6%
Bangladesh	4%
Pakistan	4%
Malawi	3%
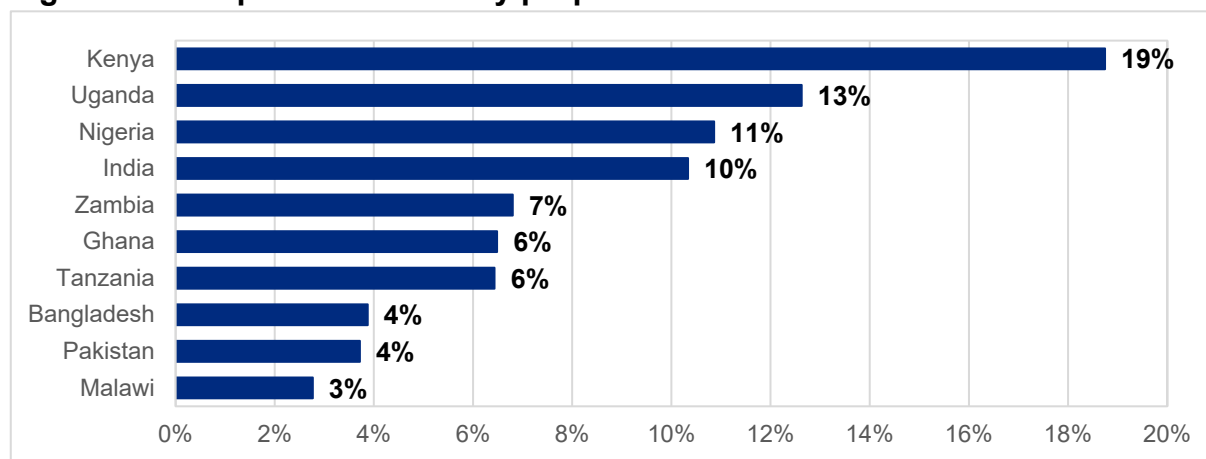
Source: CSC award data.

n = 3,793

Overall, 58% of Commonwealth Distance Learning Scholars have been male and 42% have been female. However, the gender breakdown of Distance Learning Scholarship recipients has become more balanced since the programme's inception, reaching the closest point to parity between females and males in 2012, when 48% of Scholarships were awarded to female Scholars. Since 2018 the CSC's policy is to maintain a minimal representation of females and males of 45% across each of its programmes, a threshold that has been achieved for the Distance Learning programme twice since the establishment of the policy.

Figure 1.5 – Proportion of Scholarship recipients by gender[14]
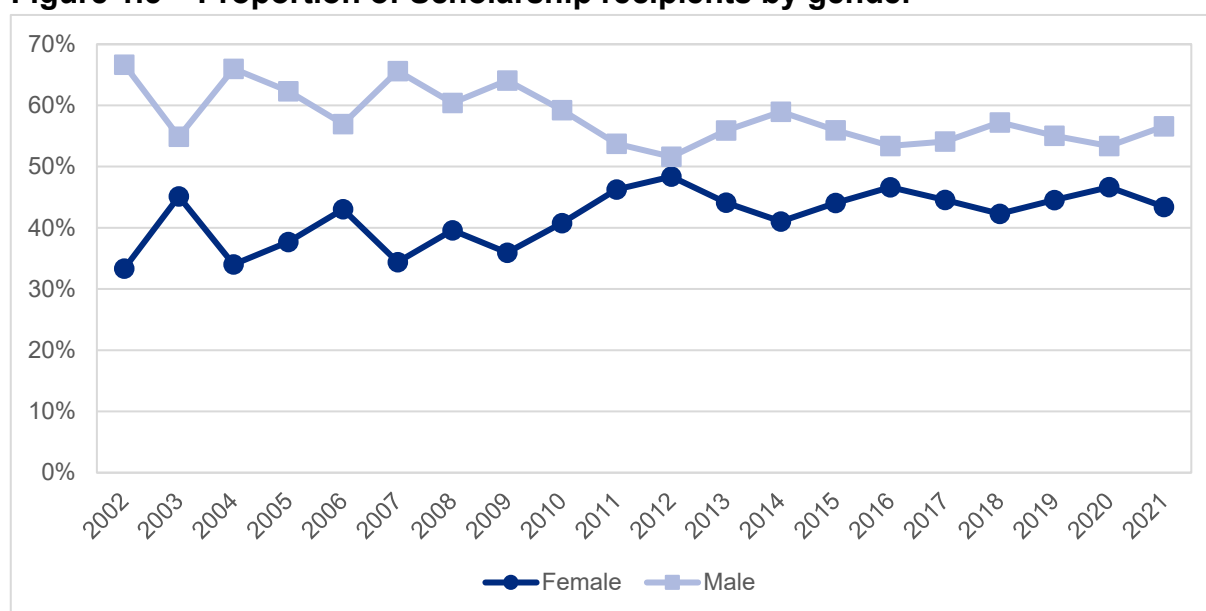
Source: CSC award data.

As discussed in the Introduction, one of the research questions was to investigate why males are overrepresented in the programme, the findings for which are discussed in Section 4.

---

[14] Note: There was one Scholar in the 2019 cohort who indicated that they 'Prefer not to say' regarding their gender, and four Scholars for whom data is not held (three in 2017 and one in 2018). However, due to the low values they were not included in the graph.

Providing Opportunities to Study

One of the objectives of the programme is to ensure that opportunities are made available to those who would not otherwise be able to study. In their pre-Scholarship Baseline survey, Scholars are asked to rate the likelihood that they would have had the opportunity to undertake their study programme either in the United Kingdom, their home country, or a third country, were they not to have received their Commonwealth Distance Learning Scholarship. These questions are used to measure how much Commonwealth Scholarships are reaching those who need them most, with response options on a scale from 1 (Impossible) to 10 (Definitely). As can be seen in Figure 1.6, when it came to being able to study a similar course in the United Kingdom, two-thirds (68%) of respondents indicated it would have been 'Impossible' without the Commonwealth Scholarship, with over nine-tenths (94%) indicating it was unlikely.

Figure 1.6 – Opportunity to study similar course in United Kingdom
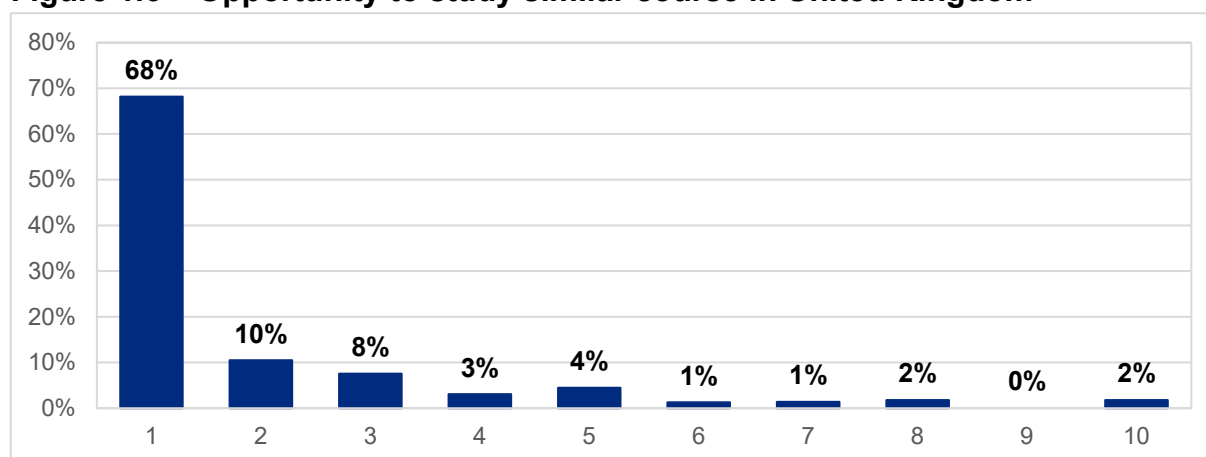
Source: Longitudinal Baseline Surveys (2016-2020)
n = 782

Scholars were more optimistic about their opportunity to study a similar course in their home country, however almost four-fifths (79%) still responded on the 'unlikely' half of the scale. The most frequent response was still the bottom option on the scale, as can be seen in Figure 1.7.

Figure 1.7 – Opportunity to study similar course in home country
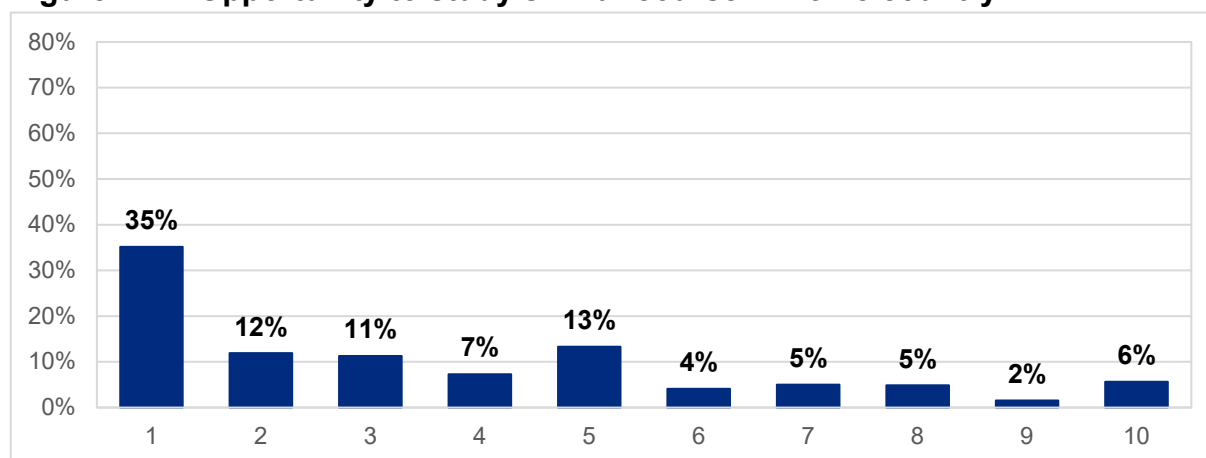
Source: Longitudinal Baseline Surveys (2016-2020)
n = 782

Finally, when asked about the opportunity to study a similar course in a third country other than their home country or the United Kingdom, the responses again skewed towards unlikely, with just

over half (52%) of respondents indicating it would be 'Impossible', and with just under nine-tenths (89%) indicating it was unlikely, as illustrated in Figure 1.8.

Figure 1.8 – Opportunity to study similar course in another country (other than home country or United Kingdom)
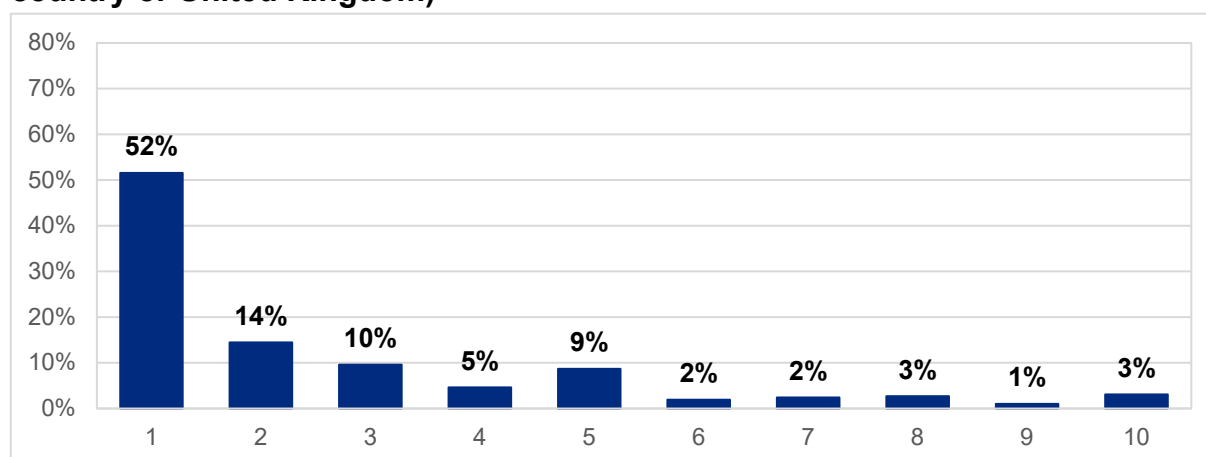
Source: Longitudinal Baseline Surveys (2016-2020)
n = 782

These responses help to demonstrate that the Commonwealth Distance Learning programme is largely achieving its goal of providing opportunities to those who would not otherwise be able to undertake this type of study.

Pre-Scholarship Employment Status

Scholars are typically employed prior to starting their Commonwealth Scholarship, with almost nine-tenths (88%) indicating that they were employed at the time of taking up their Scholarship. Of the remaining portion, they are split between those who were both employed and studying (5%), only studying (1%), or neither employed nor studying (6%).

Figure 1.9 – Employment status prior to Scholarship
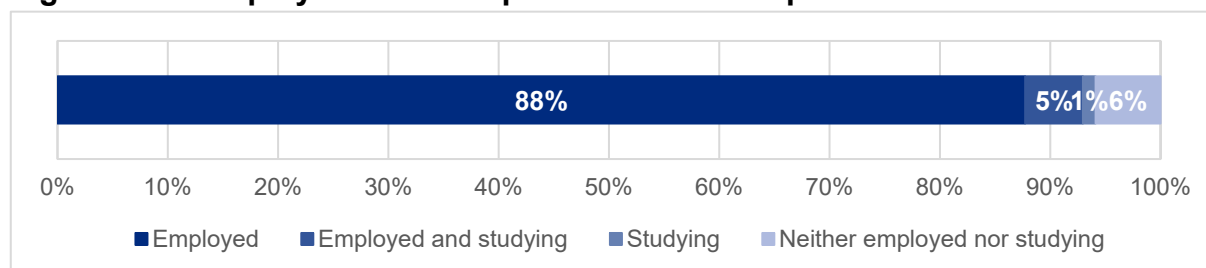
Source: Longitudinal Baseline Surveys (2016-2020)
n = 782

Of those Scholars who were either employed or employed and studying upon take-up of their Scholarship, almost two-fifths (38%) reported that they worked in the Public sector with another quarter (24%) working in the NGO sector, as illustrated in Figure 1.10. Most other Scholars who were working prior to their Scholarship come from either the Private (20%) or Academic (12%) sectors, with only a handful coming from the Multilateral or Other sectors (4% and 2% respectively).

Figure 1.10 – Sector of employment at time of take-up of Scholarship
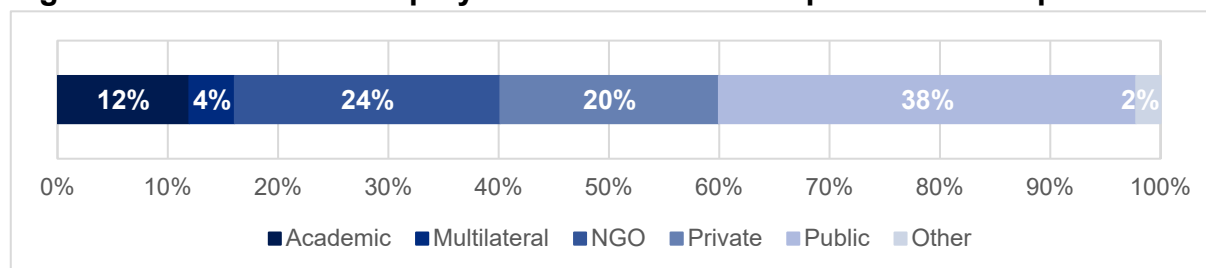
Source: Longitudinal Baseline Surveys (2016-2020)

n = 727

*Only asked if respondent was 'Employed' or 'Employed and studying'.

Finally, incoming Distance Learning Scholars were asked what their employment intentions are for when they begin their Scholarship. This is illustrated in Figure 1.11 below.

Figure 1.11 – Employment intentions during study
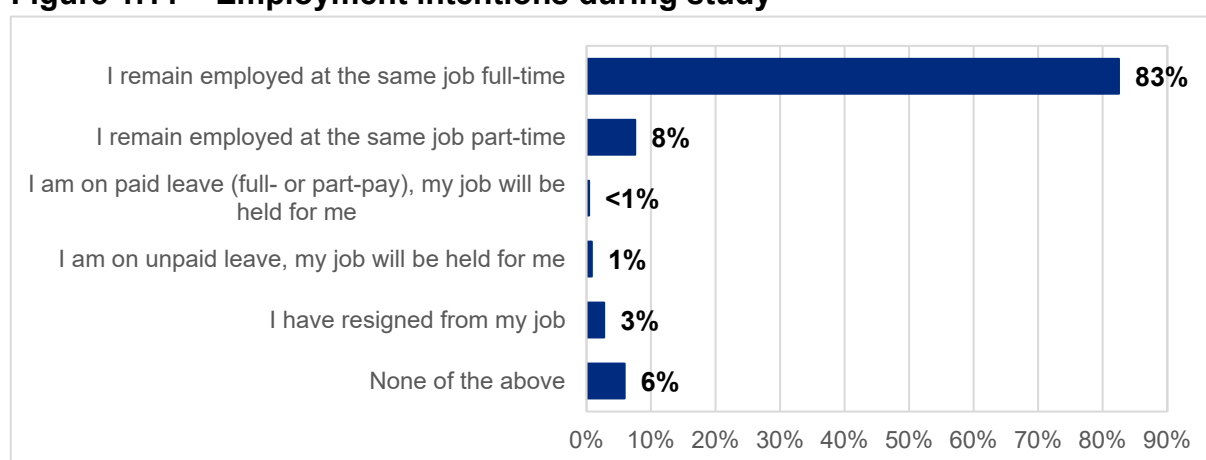
Source: Longitudinal Baseline Surveys (2016-2020)

n = 727

*Only asked if respondent was 'Employed' or 'Employed and studying'.

A strong majority of respondents who were employed pre-Scholarship indicated that they remain employed at their job, with most (83%) indicating that they did so on a full-time basis (compared to just 8% who said they were continuing part-time). A tiny proportion of respondents indicated that they had taken either paid (<1%) or unpaid (1%) leave from their job, which will be held for them to return to. A handful of respondents (3%) reported that they had resigned from their job, while the remaining respondents (6%) said that none of the above options reflected their employment situation.

Motivations

Scholars replying to the 2021 Distance Learning Scholar survey were asked to indicate what their motives were when applying for a Commonwealth Distance Learning Scholarship, selecting as many options as were applicable to them. The responses to this question are illustrated in Figure 1.12 below.

Figure 1.12 – Motivations for applying for a Commonwealth Distance Learning Scholarship (multiple response)

Motivation	Percentage
I wanted to apply for a higher education scholarship	66%
I wanted to apply to this particular study programe	64%
I wanted to continue working during my studies	62%
I wanted to apply for a Commonwealth Scholarship	58%
I wanted to apply for a distance learning scholarship	47%
I wanted to apply to this particular university	33%
I wanted to study part-time	30%
I was unable to travel abroad to study	28%
I had other personal commitments	16%
I was unwilling to travel abroad to study	7%
Other	3%

Source: Distance Learning Scholar Survey (2021)
n = 232

Four options were selected by more than half of the respondents, including the desire to apply for a higher education scholarship (66%), the desire to apply to their particular study programme (64%), and their desire to continue working during their studies (62%). Three-fifths of respondents indicated that they had specifically wanted to apply for a Commonwealth Scholarship (58%). Just under half of respondents (47%) indicated that they wanted to apply for a distance learning scholarship, while three-tenths wanted to apply to their particular university (33%), wanted to study part-time (30%), or were unable to travel abroad to study (28%). The desire to continue working during their studies is a particular motivation of note, due to fact that the Commonwealth Distance Learning Scholarship allows Scholars to study part-time while maintaining employment, a topic that is explored further in Section 2.

Scholars were also provided with an opportunity to explain what it was that interested them in studying at their specific institution in the United Kingdom. In the 224 comments provided by respondents, the most common theme was the 'Reputation' of the institutions, appearing in two-fifths (39%) of the responses. These responses contained references to the overall reputation of the university (including international rankings), as well as the reputation of the university with respect to the subject areas that the respondents were interested in studying. The second most common theme, mentioned in just over one-quarter (27%) of the responses, was that the Scholar had been interested in studying on the 'Specific programme' which they had applied to. In some cases, this meant that the Scholar had specifically intended to apply for that programme at their university, while in others it was because that university was the only one which offered that subject area (or the only one offering it by distance study). 'Pedagogy' was also mentioned in a similar proportion of responses (26%), where Scholars cited the teaching and learning models of both their specific institutions or the UK higher education sector more broadly, including references to the course materials and structure, and how the distance learning model was implemented.

Other themes that emerged from the responses were the 'Quality' of the education offered by the institution or the UK higher education system more broadly (20%), the 'Subject area' expertise at the university (19%), the effect that studying at that institution would have on their 'Career' (10%)

as well as the alignment of the study with their career trajectory, the 'Flexibility' that was offered through the part-time and online learning model (8%), and the 'Support' provided by the university through the application process (8%) where Scholars appreciated the quick responses and guidance from the administrative and academic staff.

Summary

To date, the Commonwealth Distance Learning programme has provided Scholarships to 3,793 Scholars from across the Commonwealth. They have come from 41 different Commonwealth countries over the life of the programme, with most Scholars coming from Africa, with Kenya, Uganda, and Nigeria being the top three countries by number of Scholars, however India, Bangladesh, and Pakistan are also among the top ten countries. While historically the programme has had a greater proportion of male Scholars, the proportions of female and male Scholars have been much closer in the past ten years. However, unlike with other Commonwealth Scholarship programmes, the proportions do not consistently hit the minimum threshold of 45% each year. This is an issue that is further explored in Section 4.

Commonwealth Distance Learning Scholarship places have been awarded to 45 different higher education institutions across the United Kingdom over the life of the programme. The University of Edinburgh, Leeds Beckett University, and the Open University have received the most places, however the specific programmes that have been awarded the most places are 'Education for Sustainability' at London South Bank University, 'Development Management' at the Open University, and 'Sustainable Development' at Staffordshire University.

Most Scholars who receive a Commonwealth Distance Learning Scholarship consistently report that they would not have the means to study on a similar course in the United Kingdom without the Scholarship. Even when asked about their ability to study a similar course within their home country or a third country, most Scholars indicated that it was unlikely that they would be able to do so. This provides strong evidence that the Distance Learning programme is meeting its objective of providing Scholarships to individuals who would otherwise not have the opportunity to pursue these types of study.

A large majority of Distance Learning Scholars report that they were employed prior to their Scholarship. Scholars come from a variety of professional backgrounds, with the plurality coming from the Public sector but also with strong representation from the NGO, Private, and Academic sectors. A similarly large majority of Scholars indicate that they intend to continue working at their existing job full-time during their studies. This demonstrates that the programme is succeeding in attracting individuals from professional backgrounds who are seeking to enhance their knowledge and skills while still maintaining their employment. This is further reflected in the fact that one of the most frequent motivations reported by Scholars as to why they applied for a Commonwealth Distance Learning Scholarship is that they wanted to continue working during their studies. Scholars were also motivated by a desire to apply for a higher education scholarship, to apply specifically for a Commonwealth Scholarship, and to apply to their specific programme of study.

The next section explores the types of knowledge and skills development that Scholars gain from their studies, and how they apply what they have learned in the workplace while they are still studying. It also examines the degree to which Scholars identify with the Commonwealth Scholarship community, and their uptake of engagement opportunities offered by the CSC.
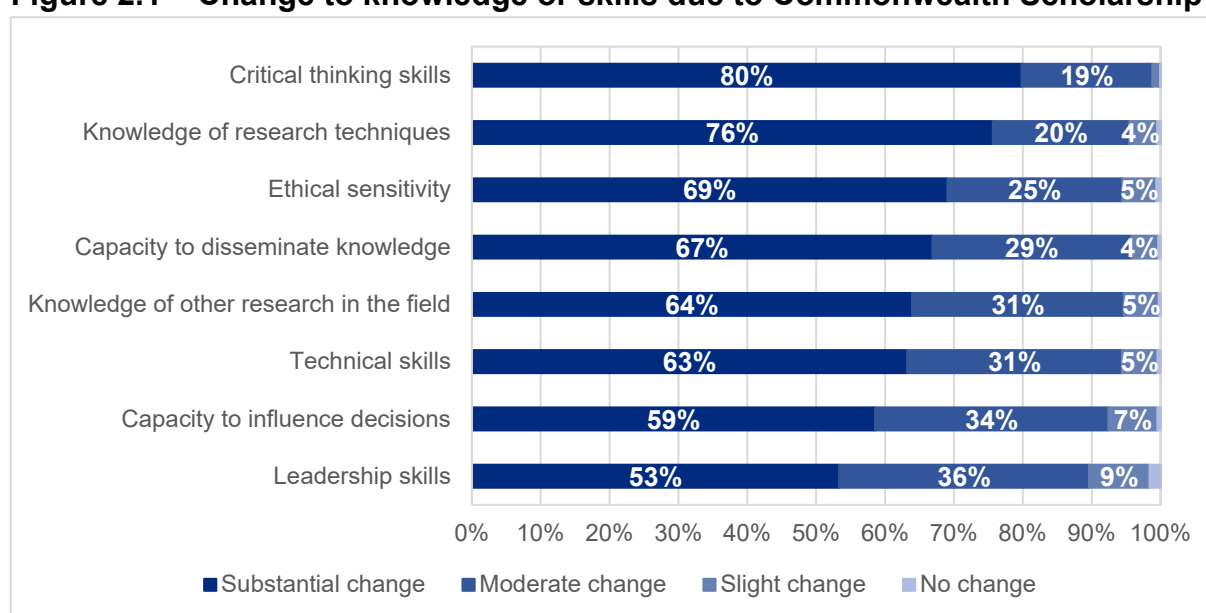
Section 2 – Scholar Experience

One of the primary aims of the Commonwealth Distance Learning Scholarship is to equip Scholars with the knowledge and skills needed to effect meaningful development impact in their home countries. The unique structure of the programme allows many of them to begin applying their learnings immediately, through their continued employment while they complete their studies. To measure the extent to which these aims are being realised, Scholars are asked as part of the annual Distance Learning survey to report changes to their knowledge and skills that have been realised through their studies, their current employment status, and (for those who are working) how they have applied those skills in the workplace. Overall, Scholars reported significant gains to their knowledge and skills, which were immediately applied in the workplace by those Scholars who were concurrently employed during their studies.

This section also explores the degree to which Commonwealth Distance Learning Scholars identify with the Commonwealth Scholarship Community and participate in engagement opportunities offered to the community. It also examines the extent to which Commonwealth Distance Learning Scholars have collaborated with other Commonwealth Scholars, Fellows, and Alumni, and the ways in which they do so. Collectively, this gives us a picture of the overall Distance Learning Scholar experience, combining the immediate academic, professional, and networking outcomes for Scholars.

Knowledge and Skills

Scholars were asked to rate the extent to which their Commonwealth Distance Learning Scholarship has developed or enhanced their knowledge and skills in eight different areas. With nine-tenths of Scholars or more reporting 'Substantial' or 'Moderate change' across all categories, it is clear that the on-Scholarship knowledge and skills gains for Distance Learning Scholars are significant. These responses are illustrated in Figure 2.1 below.

Figure 2.1 – Change to knowledge or skills due to Commonwealth Scholarship

	Substantial change	Moderate change	Slight change
Critical thinking skills	80%	19%	
Knowledge of research techniques	76%	20%	4%
Ethical sensitivity	69%	25%	5%
Capacity to disseminate knowledge	67%	29%	4%
Knowledge of other research in the field	64%	31%	5%
Technical skills	63%	31%	5%
Capacity to influence decisions	59%	34%	7%
Leadership skills	53%	36%	9%

Source: Distance Learning Scholar Survey (2017-2021)
n = 1,745

Scholars reported critical thinking as the top skill where they realised change, with four-fifths (80%) indicating they experienced a 'Substantial change' to this skill, and almost all remaining Scholars (19%) reporting a 'Moderate change'. Scholars reported similar ratios when it came to their knowledge of research techniques, with three-quarters (76%) indicating a 'Substantial change' and an additional fifth (20%) reporting 'Moderate change'. Rounding out the top three, just over two-thirds (69%) of Scholars indicated they had experienced 'Substantial change' to their ethical sensitivity, with an additional quarter (25%) reporting a 'Moderate change' to this skill. Leadership skills was the area with the least amount of reported change, but still had more than half (53%) of Scholars reporting a 'Substantial change' and an additional third (36%) reporting 'Moderate change'.

The knowledge and skills that Scholars gain through their courses can be applied immediately in their work contexts. Denis Juma, a 2019 Commonwealth Distance Learning Scholar from Tanzania studying Public Health and Primary Care at the University of Manchester, reported:

'As the head of the department for physiotherapy, I'm dealing with management and administration issues. When we talk about my course on public health, we have different modules. One of the modules is Health System Management which helps me a lot as the head of department in decision making and encouraging teamwork. Out of the hospital setting we do outreach activities to create awareness to the community about non-communicable diseases, their prevention and control. Currently as a finalist at Manchester University, MPH course distance learning I am writing a public health dissertation report on challenges towards tackling the rising non communicable diseases (NCDs) burden in Sub Saharan African countries.'

These workplace applications are explored further in the next subsection.

Employment Status

As discussed in Section 1, an important motivator for people applying for a Commonwealth Distance Learning Scholarship is the desire to continue working during their studies (see Figure 1.12). Unsurprisingly, this is reflected in Scholars' employment status during their studies, illustrated in Figure 2.2 below.

Figure 2.2 – Employment status during studies
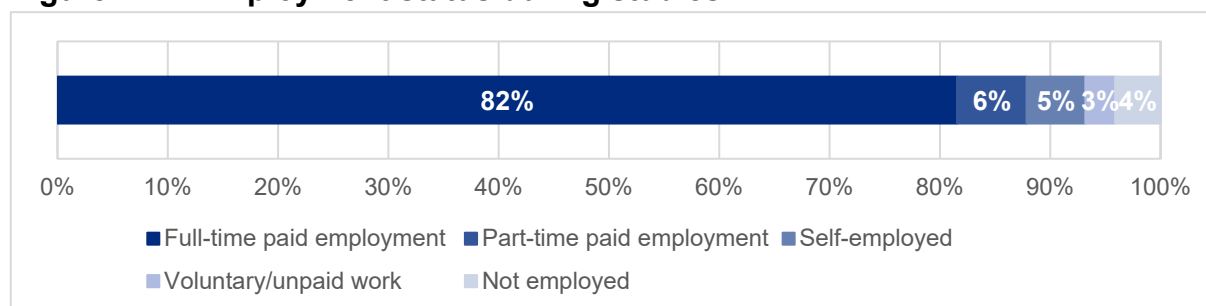
Source: Distance Learning Scholar Survey (2017-2021)
n = 1,745

Four-fifths (82%) of Scholars reported that they were in full-time paid employment during their studies, with another tenth indicating that they were either in part-time paid employment (6%) or self-employed (5%). Of the remaining Scholars, approximately half reported that they were doing voluntary or unpaid work (3%) while the other half reported that they were not employed (4%). This means that nearly all (96%) Scholars were in some form of workplace or employment context in parallel with their studies, allowing them the immediate opportunity to apply and share the skills and knowledge they are learning in these spaces.

This also indicates that Scholars do not seem to have any difficulty in maintaining employment, which (as discussed in Section 1) is an important motivator when applying for a Commonwealth Distance Learning Scholarship for two-thirds of respondents.

Figure 2.3 – Sector of employment during studies
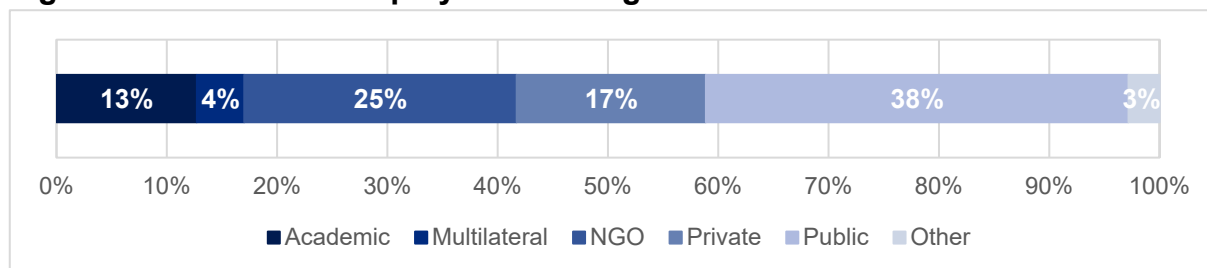
Source: Distance Learning Scholar Survey (2017-2021)
n = 1,673
*Only asked if Scholar was employed or volunteering.

Of those Scholars who indicated that they were involved in some form of employment or volunteering, nearly two-thirds indicated that they were working either in the Public (38%) or NGO (25%) sectors. The Private (17%) and Academic (13%) sectors were also represented, while only a few Scholars worked in the Multilateral (4%) or Other (3%) sectors. This is consistent with pre-Scholarship employment.

Application of Knowledge and Skills

Importantly, Scholars who were engaged in either full- or part-time employment also reported using these new skills and knowledge at high rates in the workplace.

Figure 2.4 – Frequency of application of knowledge and skills during studies
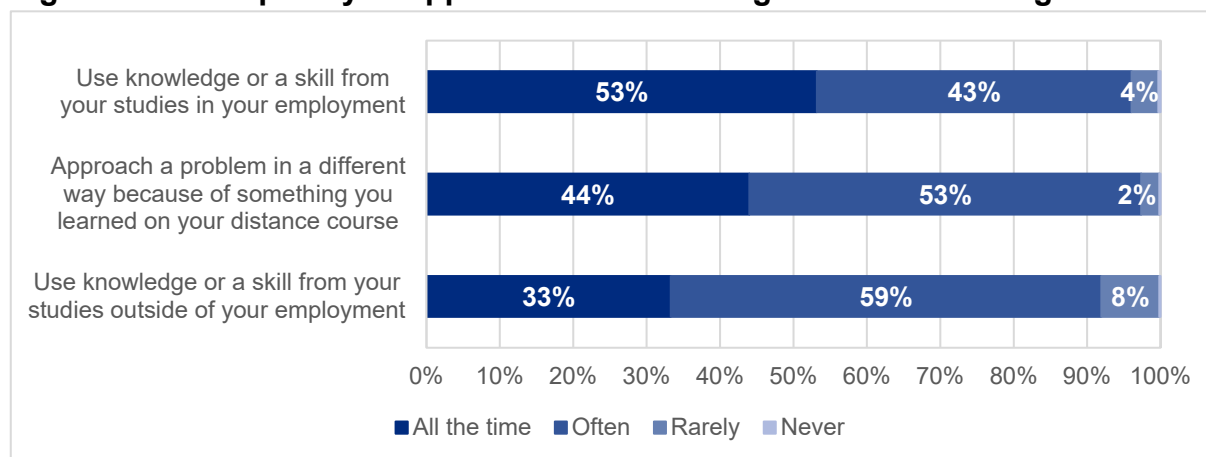
Source: Distance Learning Scholar Survey (2017-2021)

n = 1,673

*Only asked if Scholar was employed or volunteering.

Almost all respondents reported that they used knowledge or a skill from their studies in their employment either 'All the time' (53%) or 'Often' (43%). This is an important finding, as it demonstrates that Distance Learning Scholars are actively bringing their learning into the workplace during their Scholarship, giving them not only the opportunity to innovate and excel in their work, but to immediately apply their learning to real-world contexts. Boniface Bongonyinge, a 2019 Commonwealth Distance Learning Scholar from Uganda studying Public Health and Primary Care at the University of Manchester, reported doing so in their work on HIV prevention:

'I am part of the technical working group, and we were able to roll out and expand access to PrEP (Pre-exposure Prophylaxis), one of the biomedical interventions that targets adolescent girls and young women and other at-risk persons. And using the skills that I have learnt during the programme, but also basing on my experience, we were then able to look through all the data and research that has been done along that line, critically analyse them, adapt some of the strategies that are working. And I can confidently say that we have been able to roll it in our own region and the results are promising. More girls are accessing PrEP and in the long term, we are looking at averting as many HIV infections as possible.'

In addition to the workplace applications, a similar proportion of respondents reported that they would approach a problem in a different way because of something they learned on their distance course 'All the time' (44%) or 'Often' (53%). Scholars also reported using knowledge or a skill from their studies outside of their employment, with one-third (33%) of respondents saying they did so 'All the time' and another three-fifths (59%) indicating that they did so 'Often'.

Figure 2.5 – Frequency of knowledge and skill sharing with colleagues during studies
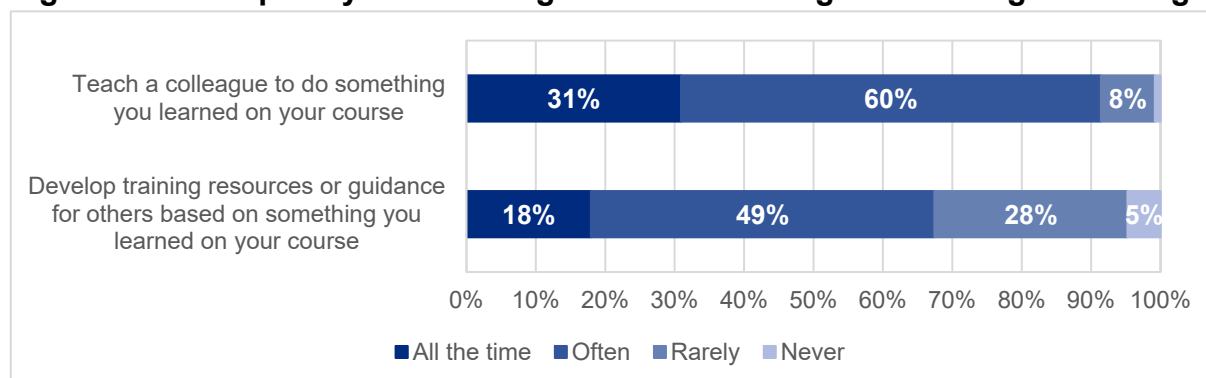
Source: Distance Learning Scholar Survey (2017-2021)

n = 1,673

*Only asked if Scholar was employed or volunteering.

Another important finding is that Commonwealth Distance Learning Scholars are actively disseminating knowledge by teaching colleagues in their workplace things that they are learning on their course (see Figure 2.5 above). Nearly one-third (31%) of respondents indicated that they did so 'All the time' with another three-fifths (60%) indicating that they do so 'Often'. This transfer of knowledge in the workplace by Scholars also takes a more formalised approach through the development of training resources or guidance for others based on something they learned on their course, an activity that one-fifth (18%) of respondents indicated they did 'All the time', with another half (49%) indicating they did so 'Often'. Out of the remaining one-third of respondents, most (28%) still said that they did so 'Rarely', with only a small fraction (5%) indicating that they 'Never' developed these kinds of training resources.

In some instances, Scholars are already lecturers themselves and they integrated what they have learned into their own teachings, as has been the case for Edwin Hara, a 2019 Distance Learning Scholar from Malawi studying Tropical Forestry at Bangor University:

'As a lecturer, I teach students at certificate and diploma level at Malawi College of Forestry and Wildlife under department of forestry to produce forestry technicians. Most of the theory part that we have covered so far in my Master's programme is directly related to what I teach or at least close to what the college offers. We have done Silviculture, Inventory, Assessment and Monitoring, Agroforestry systems and Practices, Social Issues in Forest Management and now we are doing research, which are just some of the courses that the college offers. I teach several of these courses and being exposed to the advanced knowledge at the Master's level has certainly been of great help in the delivery of the material at the certificate and diploma levels.'

Finally, Scholars also reported making or encouraging change within their workplaces (Figure 2.6) at similar rates as the development of training materials. In the case of making a change to their organisation's working practice based on something they had learned, one-fifth (20%) of respondents indicated that this was the case 'All the time', while another half (51%) indicated that this was 'Often' the case.

Figure 2.6 – Frequency of making or advocating for change within organisation during studies

	All the time	Often	Rarely	Never
Make a change to your organisation's working practice based on something you learned on your course	20%	51%	25%	4%
Encourage a senior manager to make a change based on something you learned on your course	18%	52%	27%	3%

Source: Distance Learning Scholar Survey (2017-2021)

n = 1,673
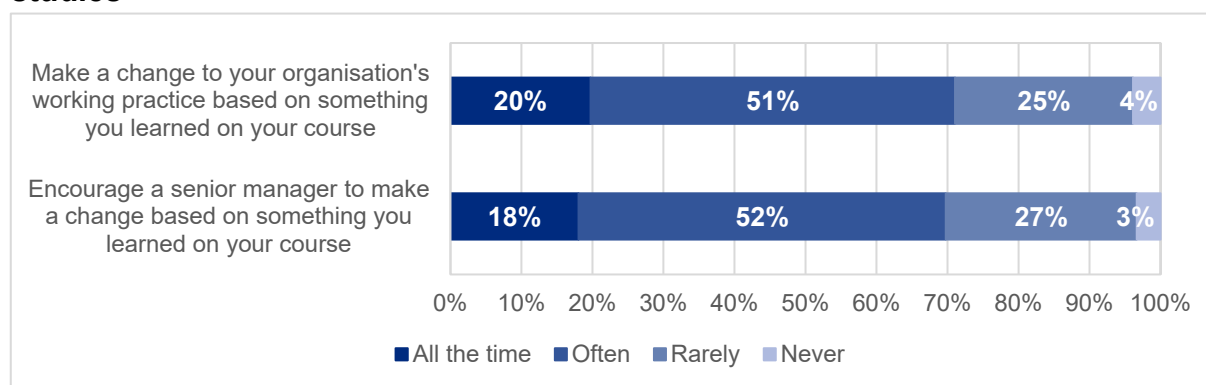
*Only asked if Scholar was employed or volunteering.

Most of the remaining respondents said that they did so 'Rarely' (25%), with only a few (4%) 'Never' doing so. The rate at which respondents encouraged a senior manager to make a change based on something they had learned on their course effectively mirrored the rates at which they made changes themselves. Moses Phiri, a 2018 Commonwealth Distance Learning Scholar from Zambia studying Carbon Management at the University of Edinburgh, suggested one such change in their workplace to save energy and reduce carbon emissions:

'I oversee scientific projects. Based on what I learnt on the programme, I realised there was a need for more sustainable methods of saving energy, than the traditional methods currently being used at the school. Using the knowledge acquired, I suggested a biodigester, which is now being used for cooking. I am also able to implement a lot of projects which are centred on sustainability to cut carbon emissions for this institution. For example, we are now keeping pigs that we feed using leftover food from the boarding school as way of recycling to ensure that we conserve the environment and prevent food waste. And the animal manure is used to feed the biodigester used to cook food for learners in an environmentally friendly way. The community appreciated that initiative. I don't think that would have been possible without the knowledge which I acquired on the programme.'

These responses provide strong indications that Commonwealth Distance Learners are not only developing a broad range of skills and knowledge, but almost all of them are also immediately applying their new skills and knowledge in professional settings. Significantly, they are also passing these skills and knowledge on to their co-workers either through informal training or to a lesser extent through the creation of formal training materials. Scholars are also working to make changes to their organisations' working practices either through their own actions or by advocating for changes through their senior managers.

Identification as a Commonwealth Scholar

Recognising that Commonwealth Distance Learning Scholars, who are not resident in the UK during their studies, will have less opportunities to engage in face-to-face activities with the wider CSC community, the CSC sought to explore the degree to which Distance Learners identified as Commonwealth Scholars and partook in the engagement opportunities offered by the CSC.

Respondents to the 2021 Distance Learner Scholar survey were asked a number of questions exploring these themes and overwhelmingly reported that they strongly identified as Commonwealth Scholars, with a full three-quarters (76%) indicating that they did so 'A lot', with most of the remaining respondents (19%) indicating that they 'Somewhat' identify as a Commonwealth Scholar (see Figure 2.7 below). Only a single respondent (<1%) indicated that they 'Not at all' identified as a Commonwealth Scholar.

Figure 2.7 – Degree to which respondent identifies as a Commonwealth Scholar
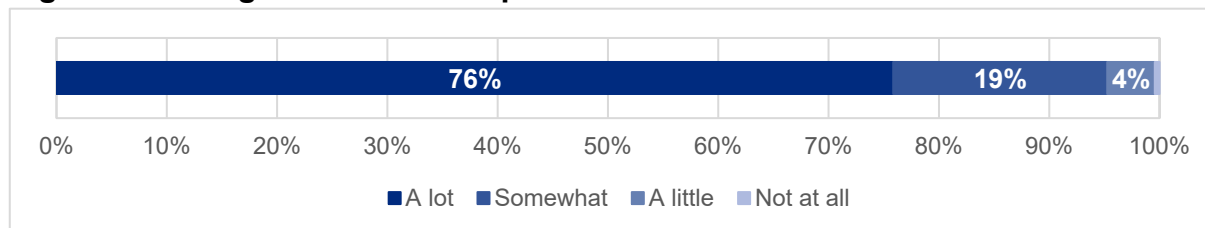
Source: Distance Learning Scholar Survey (2021)
n = 232

Over half (57%) of respondents indicated that they feel a part of the Commonwealth Scholar community 'A lot', as illustrated below in Figure 2.8. Consequently, the response rates for the other options are much higher with almost one-third (29%) of respondents saying they only 'Somewhat' felt a part of the community, one-eighth (12%) that they only felt a part of it 'A little', and a few (2%) indicating 'Not at all'.

Figure 2.8 – Degree to which respondent feels a part of the Commonwealth Scholar community
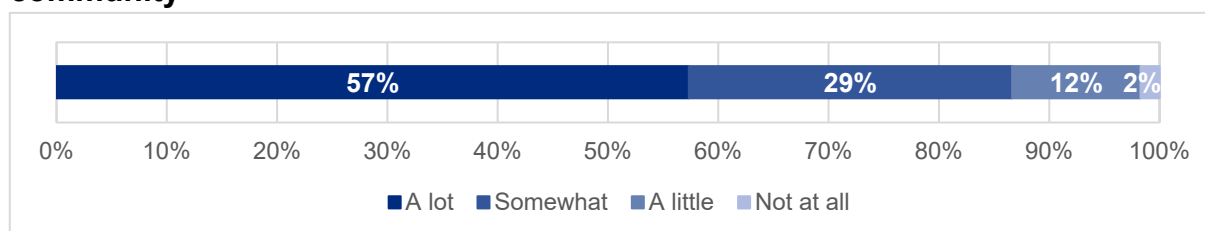
Source: Distance Learning Scholar Survey (2021)
n = 232

Respondents were also given an opportunity to provide some comments regarding their feelings around their identity as Commonwealth Scholars and being a part of the community. For those respondents who said they identified as a Commonwealth Scholar 'A lot' or 'Somewhat',[15] the top reasons given as to why they did so were gratitude for the Scholarship and the opportunity it provided (22%), the basic fact that they had received a Commonwealth Scholarship (17%), and pride in what the Scholarship represents and how prestigious it is to have received one (16%). Conversely, while only a handful of respondents indicated that they identified as a Commonwealth

---

[15] n = 161

Scholar 'A little' or 'Not at all',[16] it is worth noting the top responses that appeared in these respondents' free text questions. Three Scholars cited a lack of networking opportunities (33%), while two each cited a lack of engagement opportunities for Distance Learners (22%) or a lack of engagement on the Scholar's own part (22%).

Respondents were also asked what they thought the CSC could do to ensure that they feel a part of the Commonwealth Scholar community, with five interrelated themes prevalent in the 205 free text responses provided. The most frequently mentioned theme revolved around 'Networking', with just over one-quarter of respondents (28%) suggesting that they would appreciate increased opportunities to meet and interact with other Commonwealth Scholars and Alumni. Responses that provided specific suggestions included a desire for more opportunities to meet either online or in-person, with in-person events possibly occurring at a regional or national level. There was also a desire expressed for more interactions with Scholars from other CSC Scholarship schemes.

A similar proportion (24%) of respondents suggested more in the way of 'Communication' to make them feel a part of the Commonwealth Scholar community. This included the provision of more information about how to be a part of the community and related activities, notifications when there will be events taking place, and regular newsletters or updates about the CSC. 'Engagement' (14%) was the third-most frequent theme, suggesting more opportunities for engagement be they online (such as communities of practice, professional development workshops, social media groups, or conferences) or in-person (local in-country events). Many of these comments also overlapped with the 'Communication' theme, asking for increased communication about engagement opportunities. Providing 'Opportunities' for Scholars was also mentioned by approximately one-eighth (12%) of respondents. These suggestions included regular Alumni conferences so that they can share their work and network with others, access to the opportunity to apply for CSC Fellowships or PhD funding, and access to events put on by the Association of Commonwealth Universities. The final thematic area of note was 'Alumni' (8%), which suggested increased communications in the initial period when Scholars become Alumni, and efforts to strengthen in-country Alumni Associations.

While these are all suggestions from Scholars about things the CSC could do, it is important to note that many of these activities are already offered by the CSC. This suggests a potential need for more signposting of these activities to Commonwealth Distance Learning Scholars. These topics are explored further in the next subsection.

Engagement

Turning to the participation of Distance Learning Scholars in engagement opportunities offered by the CSC, respondents were asked to identify which activities offered by the CSC they were aware of, with responses illustrated in Figure 2.9.

---

[16] n = 9

Figure 2.9 – Awareness of CSC engagement activities
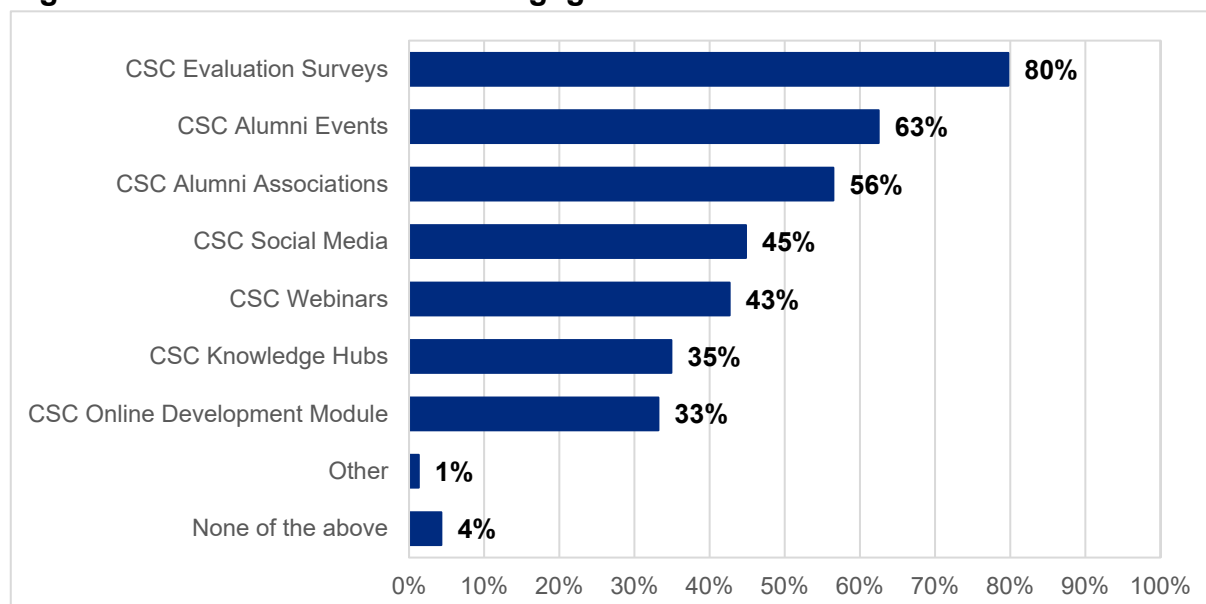
Source: Distance Learning Scholar Survey (2021)
n = 232

Evaluation Surveys were the activity with the most awareness among respondents, with four-fifths (80%) indicating that they knew about them. Alumni Events (63%) and Alumni Associations (56%) were also familiar to a majority of respondents, while just under half indicated that they were aware of the CSC's Social Media activity (45%) and the CSC Webinar series (43%). The CSC's Knowledge Hubs (35%), subject-specific discussion forums on LinkedIn for Scholars and Alumni, and the 'Understanding Development Impact' module (33%),[17] a bespoke CSC-produced online course hosted on the FutureLearn platform, were the least well-known activities with only one-third of respondents indicating that they were familiar with them.

However, it is worth noting that these numbers are likely lower than the actual rates of awareness among Scholars. This is best illustrated by the fact that only 80% of respondents indicated that they were aware of CSC Evaluation Surveys in a CSC Evaluation Survey. As such, the rates of awareness may be artificially depressed due to a lack of familiarity among Scholars with the terminology for some of the engagement activities. However, it is still important to acknowledge these relatively low awareness rates given the feedback from Commonwealth Distance Learning Scholars in the previous subsection expressing desire for more engagement and networking opportunities.

As a follow-up, respondents were also asked to identify which CSC activities they have participated in. As illustrated in Figure 2.10, Evaluation Surveys had the highest participation rate with almost nine-tenths (87%) of respondents who knew about them indicating that they also participated in them. The Online Development Module ('Understanding Development Impact') also had a high conversion rate, with three-quarters (73%) of the respondents who knew about it also taking part.

---

[17] Note that the survey referred to the 'CSC Online Development Module' rather than the 'Understanding Development Impact' module, which may have impacted Scholars' responses.

Figure 2.10 – Participation rates in known CSC engagement activities

Activity	Participation
CSC Evaluation Surveys (n = 185)	87%
CSC Online Development Module (n = 77)	73%
CSC Social Media (n = 104)	47%
CSC Webinars (n = 99)	44%
Other (n = 3)	33%
CSC Knowledge Hubs (n = 81)	32%
CSC Alumni Events (n = 145)	32%
CSC Alumni Associations (n = 131)	25%
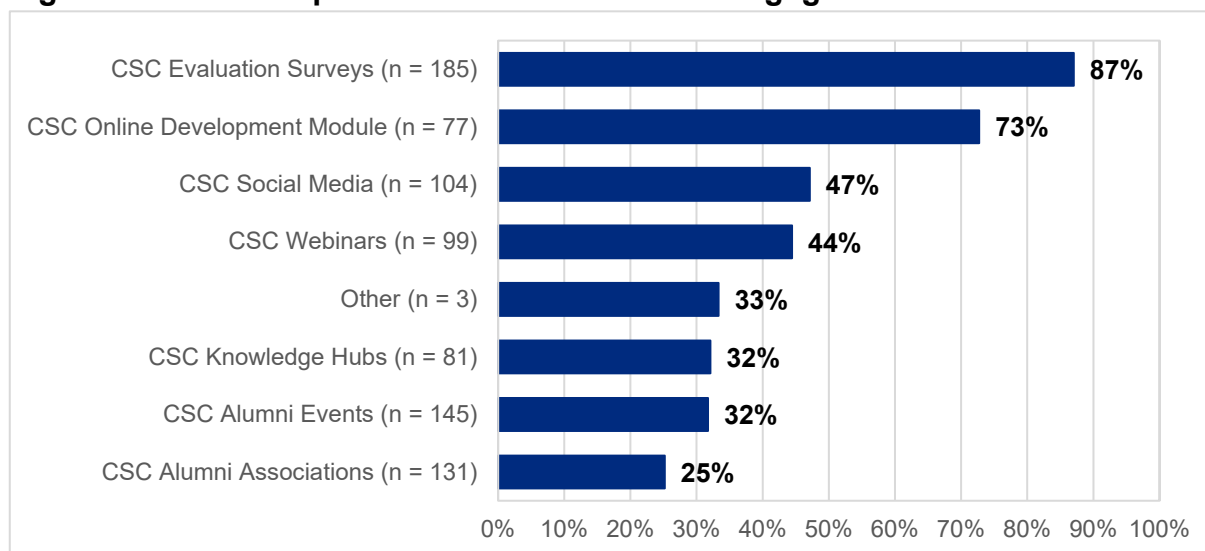
Source: Distance Learning Scholar Survey (2021)

Just under half of the respondents who were aware of CSC Social Media or Webinars said that they participated in them (47% and 44% respectively), while one-third of respondents who were aware of the Knowledge Hubs and Alumni Events (32%) also participated in them. Only one-quarter (25%) of respondents who were aware of the CSC Alumni Associations indicated that they participated in them.

While it is important to examine the participation rate in different CSC engagement opportunities among those Distance Learning Scholars who were aware of them, it is also worth noting what the overall participation rate is for these activities among all survey respondents, even among those who were unaware of them, as this helps to illustrate the general participation rate. This breakdown is illustrated in Figure 2.11 below.

Figure 2.11 – Overall participation rate in CSC engagement activities

Activity	Participation
CSC Evaluation Surveys	69%
CSC Online Development Module	24%
CSC Social Media	21%
CSC Alumni Events	20%
CSC Webinars	19%
CSC Alumni Associations	14%
CSC Knowledge Hubs	11%
Other	<1%
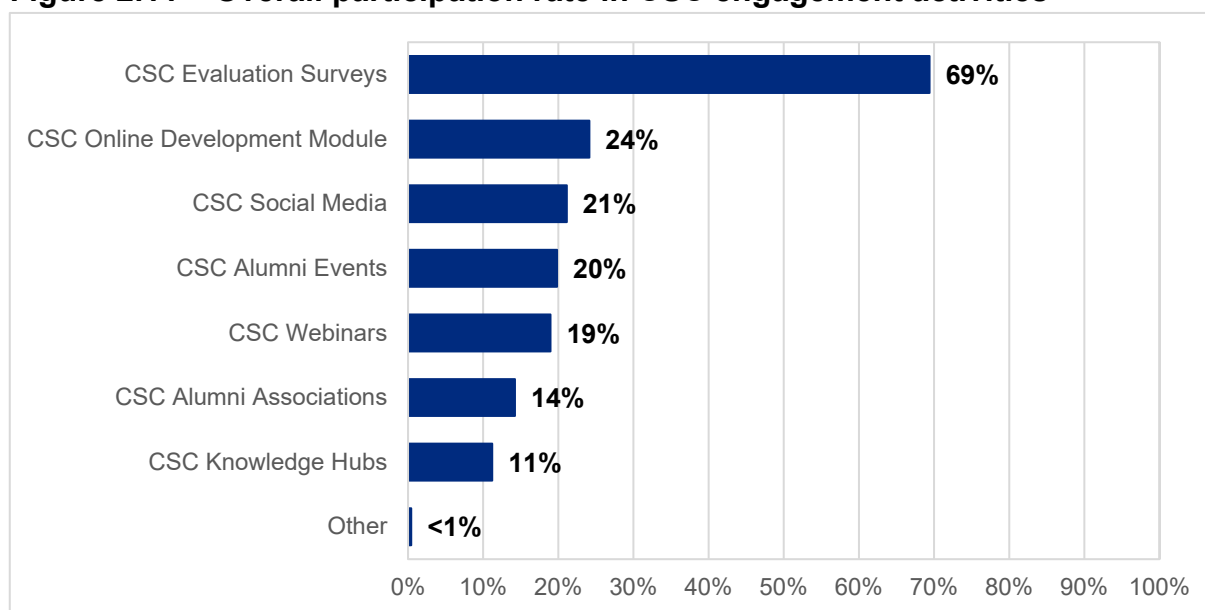
Source: Distance Learning Scholar Survey (2021)
n = 232

CSC Evaluation Surveys have the highest participation rate among respondents overall, at just over two-thirds (69%). After that there is a significant drop off, with the participation rate for all other

activities ranging from a low of one-tenth (11%) for Knowledge Hubs up to one-quarter (24%) for the Online Development Module ('Understanding Development Impact').

Collaborations with Other Commonwealth Scholars, Fellows, and Alumni

Collaborations between Commonwealth Scholars, Fellows, and Alumni is increasingly an area of interest for the CSC, and something that the CSC seeks to foster through the engagement opportunities it offers which were discussed in the previous sub-section. To that end, Distance Learning Scholars were asked whether they worked with any Scholars, Fellows, or Alumni as a part of their work or any other activities that they were engaged in. As illustrated in Figure 2.12, three-tenths of respondents indicated that they worked with these groups in some manner.
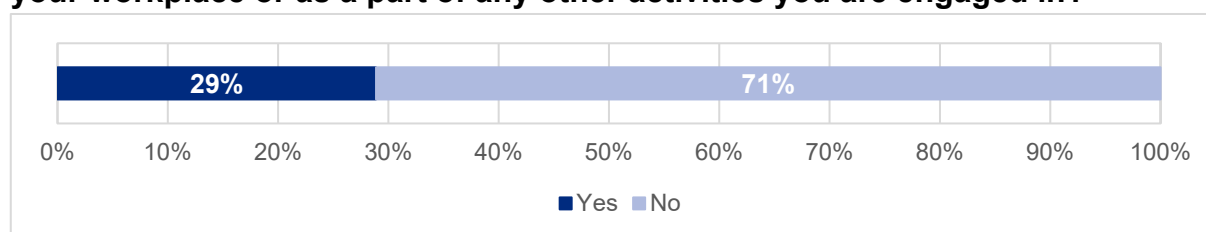
Figure 2.12 – Do you work with any other Commonwealth Scholars, Fellows, or Alumni in your workplace or as a part of any other activities you are engaged in?

Source: Distance Learning Scholar Survey (2021)
n = 232

Scholars who selected 'Yes' described the ways in which they were working with, collaborating, or otherwise interacting with other Commonwealth Scholars, Fellows, or Alumni. Among the 65 responses to this question, there were three themes that were mentioned in approximately one-quarter of the responses. The first theme was that they had 'Professional' (26%) contacts with other members of the CSC community. This consisted of interacting on a professional basis, either by discussing topics of mutual interest within their sector, sharing knowledge, experience, and advice, and collaborating on projects. Similarly, one-quarter (23%) of respondents indicated that they worked with other Commonwealth Scholars, Fellows, or Alumni as 'Co-workers'. This was distinct from 'Professional' in that in these instances they worked together in the same organisation.

The other common theme mentioned in one-quarter of the responses (25%) was that they were working together on their 'Studies'. This largely consisted of working with other Scholars who were in the same programmes in the form of study or discussion groups and providing moral support for each other. In some instances, this also included making plans for future professional work. These linkages between Scholars were flagged as an important part of the programme by Edwin Hara, a 2019 Distance Learning Scholar from Malawi studying Tropical Forestry at Bangor University:

'In my cohort of 2019, we are two scholars from Malawi, but I have several friends that I'm able to share professional, academic, as well as personal issues. I feel it's right and necessary to maintain these relationships or networks, because today more opportunities lie within the networks. Being part of the student community has really widened my network, which I feel is playing a positive role in most aspects of my day-to-day life. I have colleagues in Zambia, Uganda, Ghana, and all over the world, we communicate, we interact and share our experiences on various issues.'

A fourth theme, 'Impact' was mentioned in just under one-fifth (17%) of the comments, which involved any instance where the respondent was working with other Commonwealth Scholars, Fellows, and Alumni on projects that are intended to have a development impact. Examples provided by the respondents included working on conservation education programmes in local communities, working on collaborative bodies to lobby for policy and law changes, and planning to register an NGO to further the work they have started through their Commonwealth Scholarship.

Other themes that emerged from these responses were 'Mentoring' (14%), whereby the Scholar was either mentored by an Alumni or were providing mentoring to other Scholars or Fellows, 'Research' (8%) in instances where they were working on research and grant proposals together, and 'Alumni' (6%) where they were interacting with others through Alumni-oriented activities or organisations. These post-Scholarship interactions were emphasised by Moses Phiri, a 2018 Distance Learning Scholar from Zambia studying Carbon Management at the University of Edinburgh:

'I have very good relationship with other Distance Learning Scholars and Alumni. While on the programme I was able to collaborate with several colleagues on the programme from my continent, as well as from other continents. And after completing the programme, I've been involved in the online meetings where we share topical issues. I've also been involved with the local Commonwealth Alumni Association in Zambia as the facilitator to share information with them. I attended a few CSC events such as the orientation meeting for the Commonwealth alumni, and I was selected as a member of Commonwealth Alumni Advisory Panel.'

These examples of collaboration help to demonstrate the positive benefits of the efforts made by the CSC to foster a community among Commonwealth Scholars, Fellows, and Alumni. They also highlight the importance of ensuring that Commonwealth Distance Learning Scholars are aware of and involved with the engagement opportunities that are offered to the Commonwealth Community by the CSC so that these opportunities are not lost.

Summary

Most Distance Learning Scholars reported that they have experienced substantial change in their knowledge and skills across a variety of areas, including critical thinking, research techniques,

ethical sensitivity, capacity to disseminate knowledge, and technical skills. In fact, Scholars almost universally reported some change during their studies across every knowledge or skill that they were asked about. Furthermore, almost all Scholars who were employed reported frequently using knowledge or skills from their studies in their employment, in their problem-solving techniques, and outside of their employment. Scholars also reported teaching what they had learned to their co-workers either through formal or informal training. Most Scholars additionally reported that they were working to promote change within their organisation either though modifications to their own working practice, or by advocating changes with their senior managers.

The vast majority of Commonwealth Distance Learning Scholars reported that they continue to be employed during their studies, with most maintaining full-time employment. Given that one of the unique features of the Commonwealth Distance Learning programme is that it allows the opportunity for Scholars to study part-time so that they can continue their employment, the programme is substantially achieving its goal in this respect. While the plurality of Scholars indicated that they are employed in the Public sector, there is also strong representation from the NGO, Private, and Academic sectors, in similar proportions to their pre-Scholarship sectors of employment.

Distance Learning Scholars overwhelmingly reported that they self-identified as Commonwealth Scholars, with the primary reasons for this being the fact that they had received a Commonwealth Scholarship, the gratitude they feel for having received one, and the pride they feel in being recipients of a prestigious award. Fewer Scholars (but still the majority) mentioned that they felt a part of the Commonwealth Scholar community, indicating that there is room for growth in this area. Scholar suggestions for how to improve their sense of belonging to the community revolved around increased networking and engagement opportunities, and improved communication about those opportunities, general news about the CSC, and the transition into the Commonwealth Alumni programme.

Given the desire for increased engagement opportunities (some of which are already available), it is not surprising that Distance Learning Scholars' awareness of the engagement activities offered by the CSC is somewhat varied. Evaluation Surveys, Alumni Events, and Alumni Associations are known about by most respondents, while the Knowledge Hubs and Online Development Module ('Understanding Development Impact') are only familiar to about one-third of respondents. Similarly, participation rates in the different engagement activities were also varied. Among those respondents who are aware of them, the Evaluation Surveys and the 'Understanding Development Impact' module have the highest participation rates, while all other activities are participated in by less than half of those Scholars who are aware of them. This suggests that there is strong potential for growing the engagement levels of Distance Learning Scholars in existing activities, particularly as many of the engagement activities already on offer are similar to those that Scholars expressed an interest in.

Just under one-third of Distance Learning Scholars reported that they worked or otherwise engaged with other Commonwealth Scholars, Fellows, and Alumni. Most engagement that did take place was professional in nature, either through cross-organisational work, cooperation, or knowledge sharing, or by collaborating with co-workers who were also members of the CSC community. In some cases, respondents reported collaborations on activities that were working towards developmental impact such as community education projects or advocacy. Respondents also reported that they had formed study or support groups with other Scholars in their programme to further their studies.

COMMONWEALTH
SCHOLARSHIPS

Expanding Horizons:
Commonwealth Distance Learning Scholarships

Studying From Afar: Applying Learning to Practice to Improve Community Health and Livelihoods

The University of Manchester offers a Master's Degree in Public Health and Primary Care as a distance learning course.

Since 2011 the Commonwealth Scholarship Commission has funded a total of 58 Scholars to study on this course. Targeted at health professionals, the course teaches Scholars the skills and knowledge related to public health concerns at local, national and international level. Scholars develop the ability to apply relevant theory and scientific principles to practical situations and meet core-competencies in public health including transferable skills in effective communication, critical reasoning and systematic approaches to problem-solving and decision-making.

University of Manchester.

To identify the impact of the Commonwealth Distance Learning programme, the CSC Evaluation Team conducted in-depth interviews with Dr Isla Gemmell, a Senior Lecturer and Scholarships Lead on the programme at the University of Manchester. Also interviewed were two Commonwealth Distance Learning Scholars, Boniface Bongonyinge from Uganda and Denis Juma, from Tanzania, who are both studying for a Master's Degree in Public Health and Primary Care at the University of Manchester. Dr Dithan Kiragga, Boniface's employer at the University Research Company (URC) in Uganda, also shared his experience with having a Commonwealth Distance Learning Scholar working within his organisation.

Motivations and Expectations for Participating in the Distance Learning Programme

For the University of Manchester, the opportunity to acquire funding from the CSC to support the distance learning programme, and to recruit more widely, was a primary motivation for participating in the programme, as detailed by Dr Gemmell, 'Access to CSC funding enables us to recruit students who otherwise wouldn't be able to pay for their education. Recruiting CSC scholars to the programme is an opportunity to contribute to the internationalisation of the programmes offered by the university, and is key for the development of the institution and our social responsibility goals.'

Meanwhile, Dr Kiragga, employer of Commonwealth Scholar Boniface, highlighted that the continued timely delivery of work project goals by his employee was key. Therefore, the flexibility for Boniface to study part-time alongside his work was expected to work well for both the organisation and the Scholar. Moreover, Boniface would study at no financial cost to the organisation, and this was attractive for both Employer and Scholar, 'The fact that he would remain performing his duties was always a bonus for us. This is a USAID contract where we have very tight deadlines, strict delivery goals, so for him to pursue that option was a win-win for us in many ways. And the fact that the employee wouldn't strain himself financially.' Dr Kiragga added that obtaining the Master's qualification would create opportunities for his employee's career progression, which as an Employer, he was keen to support.

He's an individual that we are looking at for growth and promotion within the organisation based on his performance. I felt that he was at a stage in his career where he has had enough field exposure and experience to pursue the Master's qualification.

Similarly, Scholar Denis highlighted that encouraging high-level qualifications for employees is a mission and vision of the hospital he works for, the Bugando Medical Centre, 'Because this is a tertiary hospital, they are expecting a high-level qualification of their employees so they can support the mission and vision of the hospital. The hospital management encourages the employees to obtain higher qualifications because of the level of the hospital.'

By undertaking the Master's degree course, both Scholars had hoped to improve their work-related skills and knowledge to address and improve public health related issues in their communities, as Boniface explained, 'Initially, as a medical officer in a Regional Referral Hospital, my work centred around caring for persons who are living with HIV and AIDS. I then joined a project which focused on delivering comprehensive HIV prevention, care and treatment services, as the District Technical Co-ordinator. It is from here, that I realised that for me to be able to deliver on my tasks better, I needed appropriate skills which were unfortunately missing. This motivated me to apply for the distance learning Master's Degree in Public Health.'

Boniface Bongonyinge, Commonwealth Distance Learning Scholar (Master's in Public Health and Primary Care).

Similarly, Denis saw the studies as being directly relevant to his work tasks as he explained, 'I am a physiotherapist and mostly I deal with non-communicable diseases, but apart from that we are also dealing with patients who have complications from communicable diseases like HIV, people with diabetes, and chest problems due to COVID. Seeing patients with complications already got me motivated to take a course in public health which will equip me with knowledge on control and prevention of complications.'

Moreover, the opportunity to access funding from the CSC was a major incentive for Denis to apply for a Commonwealth Distance Learning Scholarship, 'I had no funds for my studies and being sponsored by the Commonwealth Scholarship Commission to do distance learning while working, has been a great opportunity for me.'

Denis Juma (second from the right) attending training in a Research Methodology Course (RMC) hosted by Mwanza Intervention Trials Unit (MITU) in Mwanza, Tanzania.

Resources and Mentorship: UK Provider and Employer Support to the Scholars

Throughout their studies, the Scholars have received invaluable support from both the University of Manchester and from their employers that has enabled them to progress smoothly. Upon enrolling, the University of Manchester provides extensive information and guidance about the demands of the programme and setting expectations for Scholars, which Boniface described as being extremely useful, 'I must really say that the university was very supportive, they did enough to prepare me mentally as a student to help me know what I was getting into, that it is not as easy as it looks, but it's manageable.'

His employer, Dr Kiragga also offered key support to Boniface's applications for the study programme and for the Scholarship, providing resources and equipment such as research documents and internet facilities, and by integrating the Scholar's studies within his regular work routine.

As a Commonwealth Alumnus himself, who completed a Master's Degree in International Primary Health Care at University of London in 2010 as a distance learner, Dr Kiragga draws from his own personal experiences to offer guidance and mentorship to Boniface, as confirmed by the Scholar, 'I remember I talked to my chief of party, Dr Kiragga about my study plans to pursue a career in public health. Luckily enough, he is a Commonwealth Alumnus, and he advised me that the Master's Degree in Public Health was good for the work that I am doing, and the skills gained would enhance my performance, and when I asked him to be my referee, he was totally on board.'

Similarly, Denis has received much encouragement and support from his workplace to pursue his studies, 'My employer supported me in terms of allowing me to take these studies while working. When I informed my director about my studies, he thought they were relevant to my work tasks. As a tertiary hospital we deal with consultation, and we do research. And the Human Resource Officer offered a recommendation letter for my Scholarship application.'

Denis at his office, studying and working.

The Value of an International Perspective: Benefits for Scholars and their Communities

Both Scholars highlighted the immediate benefits and impact of their distance learning studies on their day-to-day tasks in the workplace and in their local communities. Boniface reflected on the value of the knowledge, skills, and exposure to international perspectives gained from his studies to date.

For the work that I do, you need to be very analytical. And these were some of the skills that I was really lacking initially in my practice, but also in my day-to-day operations. I spend a lot of time trying to look at best practices, and evidence from other regions and countries that we can adapt and bring into our own programming. One of the course units that I started with was Evidence-Based Practice, it opened my eyes to be able to synthesise evidence, but also translate evidence into practice. My analytical skills have immensely improved. And of course, there are a number of other skills acquired, I am better organised which of course, I've come to learn through working with my tutors.

By applying the skills gained through his studies to expand biomedical interventions to improve health and livelihoods in his local area, Boniface is offering invaluable services to his community, 'Being able to expand some of the new interventions is changing lives and communities. For example, if you look at the high burden of HIV and AIDS, we know that if we can avert new infections, and provide better care for persons living with HIV our communities are going to be healthier and more productive. I am able to deliver and contribute to these efforts because of the skills that I've acquired through the CSC Scholarship.'

Denis commended the flexibility of the study course which allows Scholars to select courses that are most relevant to their work tasks. This has facilitated the immediate application of knowledge from his courses to improve delivery of his day-to-day work activities, 'In the module I am currently doing, I selected a management course on decision making. I'm applying a lot of knowledge gained from the module on health system management. This includes working as a team, listening to colleagues, making decisions together, and programming any issues together as a team. I'm looking forward to engaging so much in public health interventions, and research.'

Participating in the study programme has also created opportunities for Denis to interact with Scholars, Alumni, and organisations in his field of expertise, establishing important professional networks and learning from their experiences to shape his career development, 'I have also gained from the general exposure to international organisations and international students which has exposed me to different opportunities. By participating in seminars, listening to Alumni and what are they doing has motivated me. The knowledge, skills, and experience I have gained through the university is invaluable.'

Moreover, Denis noted that his professional relationships within the workplace have improved since he commenced his studies, something he attributed to the implementation of a participatory decision-making approach adopted from his course of study, 'As the head of the department when it comes to decision-making in the department, we work as a team. Before that people used to argue here and there. Now, with participatory decision-making we come to a concession or an agreement, and we work smoothly.'

Providing the perspective of the UK-based course Provider on perceived benefits of the distance learning programme to the Scholars and their communities, Dr Gemmell concurred with the Scholars experiences, highlighting their exposure to international perspectives and best practices, **'While studying, Scholars interact with other Scholars and they share knowledge and experiences of what works in the health sector within their contexts. Scholars get a global view of health challenges and how they are being tackled by their fellow colleagues, and this knowledge exchange is key in developing the health sector. They also get exposure to best practices that can be implemented in similar contexts.'**

Reiterating the value of the programme, and how it has benefited Scholars and their communities, Dr Gemmell convincingly flagged the importance of immediate and direct application of skills.

> **The Scholars apply knowledge and skills in their work activities, as they study. They are in the health sector, and therefore knowledge applied directly benefits the communities they work in, and they implement their learning directly into their practice, including life-saving interventions.**

Enhanced Skills, Projects, and Relationships: Benefits to the Employer

Dr Kiragga revealed how having an employee such as Boniface enrolled in the Commonwealth Distance Learning programme has been mutually beneficial to both the Scholar and his organisation. According to Dr Kiragga, the academic exposure of the Scholar has contributed to improved articulation of issues in the workplace, as Boniface translates his learnings to date into his work tasks. He added that the Scholar has been instrumental in implementing programmes to strengthen access to vital health services for the key populations targeted by their organisation.

> **The experience that the Scholar has is quite immense and he has been able to translate a lot of that learning into his work. One of his most recent accomplishments was that he was part of an excellent video story about our key populations, where his team captured stories about how the activity is implementing programmes to strengthen access to services for key populations.**

Based on his improved performance of duties, Boniface has recently been promoted to a more senior position. In this new role, Boniface has effectively represented the employer in supporting a local partner organisation, **'We promoted him to HIV Prevention Advisor and DREAMS Advisor. He was asked to step up and support a local partner, The AIDS Support Organisation (TASO), which is implementing a USAID Transition Award, The Local Partner Health Services in Acholi Activity.'**

Dr Kiragga added that he has developed more interest in the Scholar's studies over time, and his personal relations with the Scholar and his professional development have also improved, **'I guess it influences my subconscious mind as he is pursuing something that I'm involved in, it generates more interest. He has some attachment to me as a supervisor, in terms of offering him support.'**

Describing the benefits of applying the knowledge and skills gained from his studies to his work tasks, Boniface identified the importance of informal knowledge and skills transfer within the workplace. By sharing his knowledge on data for programming with his colleagues, this has not only helped upskill his team, but also improved relations with his work colleagues.

> **Several of my colleagues that I supervise or those in the same level have really benefitted from the support that I have given them. They can now appreciate better the importance of data use for programming and they've been able to improve their own skill sets and apply some of these transferable skills.**

He added that, by drawing from his newly acquired knowledge and skills, he is performing his work tasks more effectively and has contributed to new workstreams. By researching and implementing successful community interventions, he has added value to his organisation, and to his local communities.

Meanwhile, Denis is currently conducting research on health issues and implementing community health interventions with the continued support of his employer, **'My target is researching and doing community interventions, and I intend to work with the department of research or community health of my hospital to support the mission of the department of community health.'**

Looking Ahead: Scholars' Plans for Future Developmental Activities

As they progress with their studies, both Scholars revealed their personal plans and ambitions to continue contributing to developmental activities at their workplaces, in their local communities and beyond. Using the skills acquired through his studies, Boniface hopes to make a meaningful contribution to HIV prevention efforts in his country by supporting stronger health systems, influencing the implementation of HIV prevention programmes, and expanding the scope of this work beyond the regional level.

> Ultimately my interests are to contribute more to HIV prevention efforts in my country. My influence on HIV prevention interventions and programs is growing, I intend to expand my scope of work from regional level to national level programs and thereby, contribute significantly to the attainment and sustainability of HIV epidemic control.

For Denis, who is passionately dedicated to research on community interventions and promoting health education, his top priority is to embark on research collaborations with Commonwealth Distance Learning Alumni and other stakeholders in the region who have experience in the field. Upon completing his dissertation research project for his Master's degree course, he plans to share research findings with local communities to improve awareness on public health issues, 'After completing my dissertation I plan to work out of the hospital, with the community and give health education and promotion mostly on non-communicable diseases. This will prevent people from coming to the hospital with complications.'

To advance his academic career and further improve his knowledge on public health issues to deliver quality health outcomes to local communities, Denis plans to pursue PhD studies upon completing his Master's degree.

For his PhD studies, Denis intends to engage in research exploring the integration of non-communicable diseases care with communicable diseases programmes, specifically the interventions of care for cardiovascular conditions with well advanced programmes such as that of HIV and AIDS and Tuberculosis.

In preparation for his future plans to undertake PhD studies to advance his career, Denis has made several consultations with experts in his area of interest as he explained, 'I have made several consultations with experts in the area of Non Communicable diseases (NCDs) such as Dr Robert Peck who is the Associate Professor of Medicine and Pediatrics working with Catholic University and Allied Health Science (CUHAS) seeking mentorship and advice.'

Furthermore, Denis and colleagues in collaboration with his hospital-Bugando Medical Centre (BMC) and Catholic University of Health and Allied Sciences (CUHAS) have started a programme known as Non-Communicable Diseases Awareness Programme (NAP) For Healthy Communities and Well Being, which works with Catholic churches in Mwanza urban. To expand the services to all lake zone regions of Tanzania, Denis and colleagues are currently seeking for funds from interested donors, stakeholders, collaborators, and supporters of the programme.

Section 3 – Employer Perspectives

As has been highlighted throughout this report, an important feature of the Commonwealth Distance Learning programme is that Scholars are able to continue their employment and develop their careers while pursuing their studies. In addition to providing study opportunities to individuals who might be unable, or not wish to, take time off from their jobs, Distance Learning Scholars are also able to immediately apply what they have learned in their classes at their jobs. In other words, they can use their studies to have an immediate effect on their workplace rather than having to wait until they have finished their studies and returned to employment.

To further investigate this unique aspect of the programme, current Scholars provided contact details for their immediate supervisors or managers, who were then sent a survey. This Employers' survey explored the application of Scholars' learning within the workplace, and asked Employers to identify any changes they have observed as a result of their staff member's ongoing Commonwealth Scholarship. Employers were also asked about their expectations relating to the employee's studies, and their general perceptions of the Distance Learning programme. There was representation across all professional sectors among Employer respondents, as illustrated in Figure 3.1 below. These proportions largely mirror Scholars' reported sectors of employment, except for the Academic sector, where the proportion is 11% higher, and the Private sector, which is 11% lower.

Figure 3.1 – Employer sector of operation

| 24% | 6% | 24% | 6% | 41% |

0% 10% 20% 30% 40% 50% 60% 70% 80% 90% 100%

■ Academic ■ Multilateral ■ NGO ■ Private ■ Public ■ Other
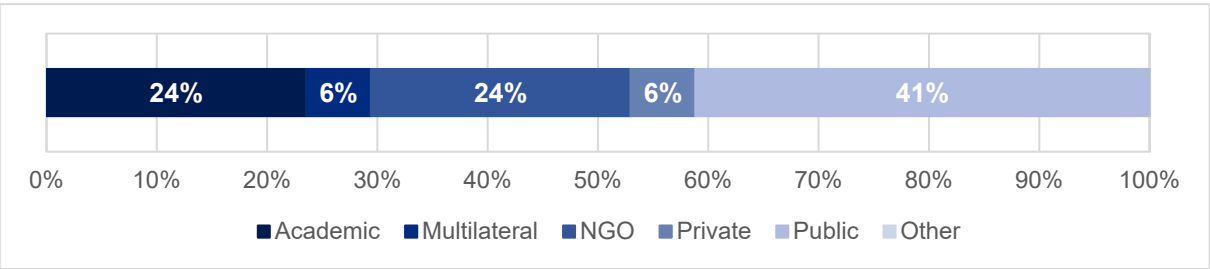
Source: Employer Survey and Distance Learning Scholar Survey (2021)
n = 17

Employers' responses supported the outcomes self-reported by the Scholars themselves. Employers reported that they had observed significant increases in their employees' knowledge and skills due to their Commonwealth Distance Learning Scholarship, and that the knowledge and skills that were gained were both actively applied in the work of their employee, but also shared with other members of their staff through informal and formal teaching by the Scholar. Overall, Employers reported that the Scholarship benefitted their organisation and met or exceeded their expectations.

Expectations

When asked to reflect on what their initial expectations were for how the Scholarship would affect both their employee's own work, as well as their wider workplace, all but one Employer (94%) said that they had anticipated positive outcomes. For some, this was just a general expectation of non-specified positive outcomes (41%), while others detailed specific results that they expected to see such as an increase in the Scholar's knowledge and skills (29%), improved organisational performance (29%), development of leadership skills (18%), and the ability for the Scholar to

provide upskilling to the rest of the staff (12%). Dan Ndalowa, who supervises a Commonwealth Distance Learning Scholar at the Malawi College for Forestry and Wildlife, described the types of upskilling they envisioned as such:

'What we hoped to achieve from this end was an opportunity to hear from the scholar how the training is conducted, because we tailor make some coursework or materials for the forestry and natural resource sector here in Malawi. We are hoping to see more of his input in how we design our courses because we also want to have a bridge programme with employees in the forestry department that left a while back. We would want to see him apply more of whatever theoretical work he has learned, and this will become handy as we get into the next year.'

One-quarter of Employers also mentioned workload as something that would need to be managed (24%), although only one had expectations that the study programme would negatively impact the Scholar's ability to fulfil their duties in the workplace (6%). Dan Ndalowa also provided an example of how Employers managed their Scholar's workload:

'What we had to do for him to be able to fully engage in his studies, was to shift or move some of his current tasks to another individual. Because we felt that if he needed time then some of the tasks that he used to do would be affected. We didn't want to be in a position where we probably want something done and he has the programme demands on the side, and so, he must juggle the two or decide which one he needs to focus more on.'

As a follow-up, Employers were also asked whether their expectations had been met to date, with almost all (94%) responding that they had, and three respondents indicating that the results had actually exceeded their expectations (18%). In all instances where the issue of workload was raised in the initial question regarding expectations, Employers subsequently indicated that they had encountered no issues with their Scholar's ability to continue to perform at a high level within their workplace. This was highlighted by Dithan Kiragga, an Employer at the University Research Company in Uganda:

'We've not had to my knowledge any adjustments made. The fact that these are online sessions they can be integrated within the regular routine. It's also happened during the time where we're having the COVID pandemic, and staff are operating within the comfort of their homes while continuing to do work activities. So, I don't think there were any interruptions. If anything, it might have pushed him to have a more intense focus on his work, to translate a lot of what he [the scholar] was learning into the fieldwork.'

Some Employers provided further details about how their Scholar's involvement with the Commonwealth Distance Learning programme was meeting or exceeding their expectations, citing examples such as authorship of scientific publications, increased organisational income due to the success of a Scholar's project, and improved organisational capacity and performance. As one employer wrote in their survey response:
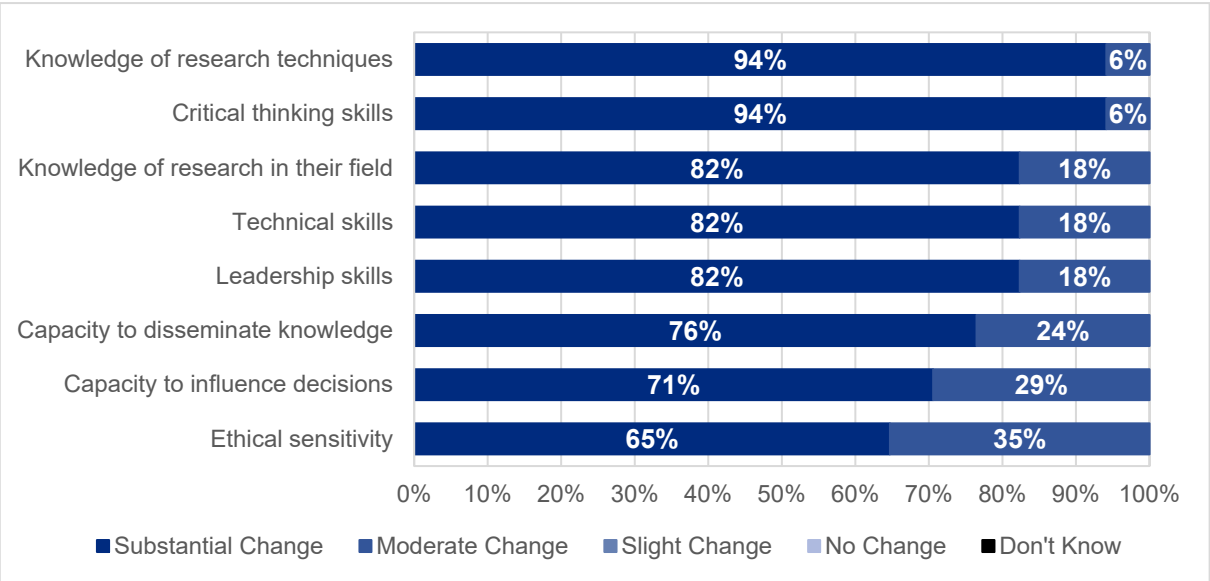
'We started a monthly train-the-trainer program where [the Scholar] taught his colleagues the newest knowledge he acquired within the month in eye care and leadership and they in turn will use same to teach others within their direct workspace. It was hugely successful as we practically grew an environment of passionate knowledge seekers. I personally like the distance learning because it gives opportunity to be working on key learning and see how they work in reality … we are hoping more people from our organisation will be given an opportunity to join the Commonwealth Scholarship scheme.'

Overall, all Employers expressed that they had seen positive results relative to their expectations, particularly in the areas of organisational performance and upskilling of the Scholar and their co-workers. The next subsection looks more deeply into Employers' perceptions of how their Scholar's skills and knowledge developed as a result of their studies.

Knowledge and Skills

Employers were asked to report any observed development of knowledge and skills in the Scholars that they managed. As can be seen below in Figure 3.2, all respondents indicated that they had seen a 'Substantial' or 'Moderate' change in their employees' knowledge and skills across all categories, reinforcing the positive self-assessments provided by Scholars, as discussed in Section 2 (see Figure 2.1).

Figure 3.2 – Observed changes to employee's knowledge and skills due to Scholarship

	Substantial Change	Moderate Change
Knowledge of research techniques	94%	6%
Critical thinking skills	94%	6%
Knowledge of research in their field	82%	18%
Technical skills	82%	18%
Leadership skills	82%	18%
Capacity to disseminate knowledge	76%	24%
Capacity to influence decisions	71%	29%
Ethical sensitivity	65%	35%

Legend: ■ Substantial Change ■ Moderate Change ■ Slight Change ■ No Change ■ Don't Know
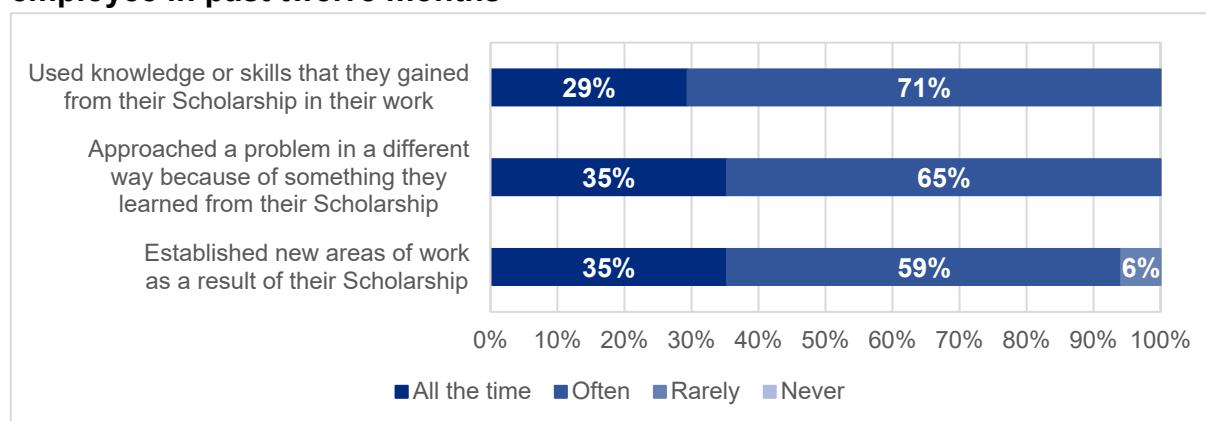
Source: Employer Survey
n = 17

Knowledge of research techniques and critical thinking skills were the areas where Employers reported the most intensive change, with almost all (94%) indicating they saw 'Substantial change' in these areas. Capacity to influence decisions and ethical sensitivity were the areas with the least intensive change, however it is still important to note that the majority of employers still reported observing 'Substantial change' for both (71% for the former and 65% of the latter), and that all others observed a 'Moderate change' in these areas.

Not only did Employers report that their Scholars' skills and knowledge were significantly enhanced due to the Scholarship, they also frequently observed that the Scholar they employed was transferring what they learned into workplace practice, as illustrated in Figure 3.3.

Figure 3.3 – Observed use of knowledge and skills from Commonwealth Scholarship by employee in past twelve months
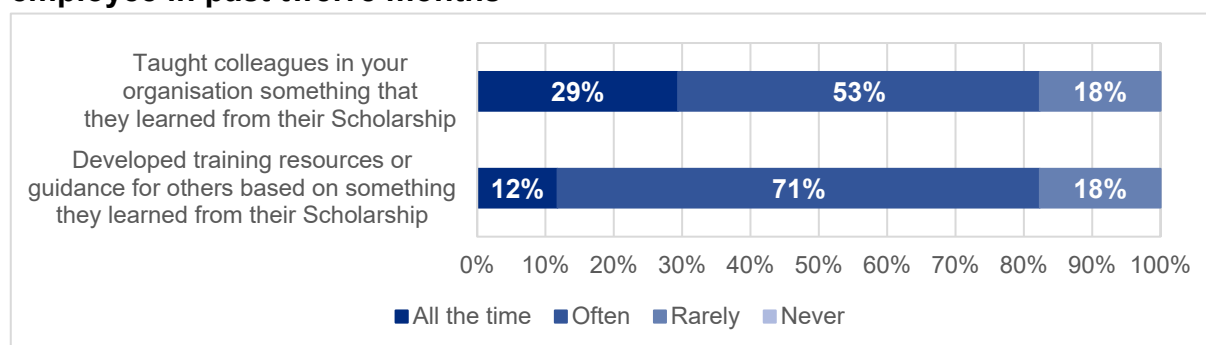

Source: Employer Survey
n = 17

Employers reported observing significant effects of the Scholarship on their employees' workplace activities. All Employers reported that they saw the Scholar using skills or knowledge that they had gained from their Scholarship in their work either 'All the time' (29%) or 'Often' (71%). Employers similarly all reported that their employee had approached a problem in a different way because of something they learned from their Scholarship 'All the time' (35%) or 'Often' (65%). Finally, almost all Employers noted that they were aware of their Scholar establishing new areas of work as a result of their Scholarship 'All the time' (35%) or 'Often' (59%), with only one Employer (6%) reporting that they observed this activity 'Rarely'.

An example of how Scholars applied their knowledge in the workplace was provided by Dan Ndalowa, who described their Scholar's integration of topics they were learning in their distance learning studies into their own teaching of students at the Malawi College for Forestry and Wildlife:

'He's getting well-grounded in some of the topics that he handles. He did something on carbon sequestration and management, and it's something that he was interested in. He was able to quickly translate that to some of his course work with the students.'

In addition to Scholars applying what they learned in their own work, Employers were also asked how frequently they knew of their Scholar teaching co-workers or developing training materials for their workplace.

Figure 3.4 – Observed sharing of knowledge and skills from Commonwealth Scholarship by employee in past twelve months
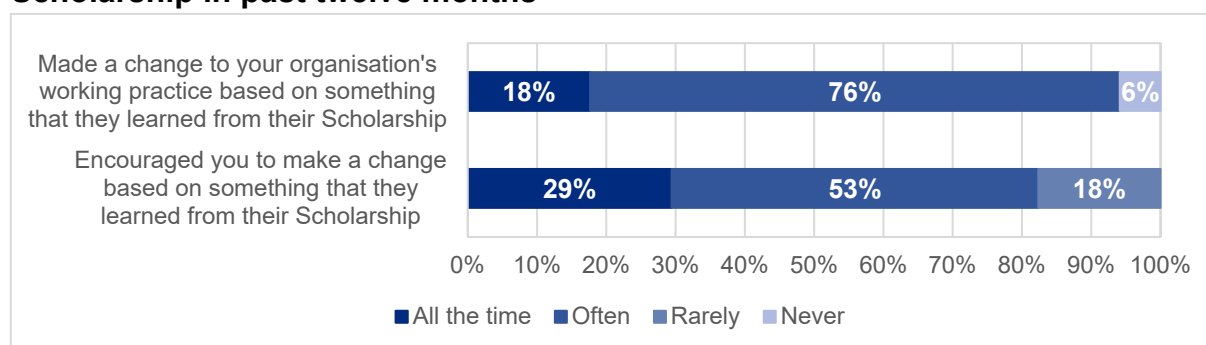

Source: Employer Survey

n = 17

In both cases, all Employers noted that their Scholars were engaged in these activities to some degree. Four-fifths of Employers reported that they were aware of their Scholar teaching their colleagues something from their Scholarship 'All the time' (29%) or 'Often' (53%), with all remaining respondents reporting their Scholar did this 'Rarely' (18%). A similar proportion of Employers reported that they knew of their Scholars developing training resources or guidance for others based on their Scholarship 'All the time' or 'Often', although they were less than half as likely to have responded 'All the time' (12%), and more likely to respond that their employee did so 'Often' (71%). Less than one fifth of Employers (18%) reported that their Scholars were developing these kinds of guidance or training resources 'Rarely'.

Employers reported that they frequently observed Scholars advocating for change within their workplace. A large majority of Employers reported that Scholars either encouraged them to make a change or the Scholars themselves made a change to the organisation's working practice based on their Scholarship learnings either 'All the time' or 'Often', illustrated in Figure 3.5 below.

Figure 3.5 – Observed advocacy for change by employee based on Commonwealth Scholarship in past twelve months

Source: Employer Survey

n = 17

All Employers noted that their Scholar had encouraged them to some degree to make a change in their workplace based on something they had learned from their Scholarship. Just under one-third (29%) of Employers said that their Scholar had done this 'All the time', while just over half (53%) said they did so 'Often', and the remainder (18%) said they did so 'Rarely'. Almost all Employers also noted that their Scholar had themselves made direct changes to their organisation's working practice based on something they had learned from their Scholarship, with one-fifth (18%) reporting

that this had happened 'All the time' and three-quarters (76%) noting that this happened 'Often'. Only one Employer (6%) reported that they had 'Never' observed this.

Employers were also given the opportunity to provide a free text response about whether they had noticed any other changes to their Scholar's skills or knowledge as a result of their Scholarship. Eleven respondents either reiterated or highlighted areas of observed improvement that have been discussed above, including analytic skills, critical thinking, use of or advocacy for evidence-based decision making, leadership skills, and writing skills.

Organisational Impact

As highlighted in the previous section, Employers observed their Commonwealth Distance Learning Scholars rapidly gaining knowledge and skills through their Scholarship, applying these directly to their workplace activities, disseminating knowledge to their co-workers and advocating for positive changes within their organisations. Employers were asked to feed back more directly on the broader organisational impact of their employees' participation in the Scholarship programme, including any changes to policies, practices, or work. They were also asked to describe any benefits or challenges that their organisation has encountered as a result of the Scholarship.

With respect to new policies, practices or work pursued by their organisation, just over half (53%) of Employers indicated that this had occurred due to their employee's Scholarship. Employers who responded 'Yes' to this question were asked to provide details of these new developments in a free text response. Three Employers provided examples of policy-related developments, with specific mentions of the introduction of (or changes to) workplace policies around HIV treatment and prevention, issues of stigma and discrimination, approaches to diabetes, COVID-19, and clinical guidelines. One respondent highlighted that their Scholar had played an important role in driving the business continuity plan for their organisation.

Six Employers mentioned changes to practice (including some associated with the policy changes described above). These changes included improved teamwork and transparency, the integration of a Scholar's new skills into the organisation's research methodology, and expansions in workplace training offerings. Finally, four Employers described new work that had been initiated and was at least partially enabled by the Scholarship, including the procurement of increased funding (leading to recruitment of additional staff), the expansion of organisations' scope of work and offerings, increased capacity through investment in additional equipment or lab resources, and the development of a new department within their organisation.

For those Employers who responded that there had not been any developments in these areas, they were asked whether there were any particular reasons why this was the case. The most frequently cited reason was that their organisation did not have authority to make those types of changes, with the mandate and policy of the organisation being set by the government. In one instance the Employer indicated that despite these constraints, they hoped to advocate for changes to take advantage of their Scholar's learnings in the next organisational planning period. COVID-19 was another major issue cited by Employers, who indicated that the pandemic had slowed or restricted the work of their organisation, limiting the opportunity for changes to policy or practice, or the pursuit of additional work. Finally, in one instance an Employer indicated that these changes had not occurred because their Scholar was no longer working for the organisation.

There were a number of organisational benefits that Employers attributed to their Scholar's Commonwealth Distance Learning Scholarship. In some cases, these benefits were specific to the improved job performance of the individual Scholar (which ultimately benefitted the organisation), while in others they were broader organisational effects. On the individual level, Employers reported benefiting from enhanced job performance, creative and critical thinking, the application of skills and knowledge, greater leadership, and enhanced teaching of students. Organisationally, Employers reported the enhanced use of research techniques and planning, increased organisational capacity and resourcing, the internationalisation of the organisation (in terms of perspective, reputation, and partnerships), improved teamwork, and an increased standard of performance and service delivery. As Dithan Kiragga, an Employer at the University Research Company in Uganda, reported about the Scholar they employed:

'He's been a staff of ours and I've been monitoring his performance. As a team leader on HIV Prevention, he has contributed a lot of knowledge [from his studies to strengthen the learning and performance on the project. He has grown in confidence, and led a USAID funded HIV prevention activity on service provision to key populations, DREAMS, VMMC, etc in one of the five regional USAID comprehensive programmes that we have in the country. We had the best performance across the entire country across a number of these prevention areas.'

Conversely, Employers reported very little in the way of organisational challenges as a result of their employees' participation in the Scholarship. In fact, two-thirds (69%) of respondents explicitly stated that they had not encountered any workplace challenges associated with the Scholarship. For the few Employers who did report challenges, the most frequently cited issue was the amount of extra time or energy that their staff member had to dedicate to their studies on top of their normal workload. However, it was noted by Employers that this issue cut both ways. In some instances, studies pulled their staff away from work (with their Employer's blessing), while on other occasions, work duties (with specific mention of increased work due to the pandemic) pulled staff away from their studies, although it was noted that universities were very accommodating when this happened. The two other challenges mentioned were a lack of resourcing (either to implement changes in the organisation, or for the Scholar to pursue desired follow-on studies), and the difficulties encountered when trying to implement organisation-wide changes, including slow buy-in and uptake of proposed changes to strategies and work plans.

Networks and Relationships

In addition to the direct organisational impact based on their Scholar's increased knowledge and skills, and the resulting influence on workplace policies and practices, Employers also shared details of the impact that their employee's involvement in the Commonwealth Distance Learning programme has had on their networks and relationships with other organisations. Just under one-third (29%) of Employers indicated that they had formed new relationships with international organisations, universities, or contacts through their staff member's Commonwealth Scholarship. Universities were the most frequent type of new partners, with Employers indicating that their organisations were now working with universities in Guyana (University of Guyana, Texila American University, Green Heart University), the Caribbean (University of the West Indies),

Canada (University of Ottawa), and the United States (University of Virginia, University of Georgia). New relationships with international bodies were also mentioned by Employers, for example with the Pan-American Health Organisation (PAHO), the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR), the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), the World Agroforestry Centre, and the International Union for Forestry Research Organisation (IUFRO). Finally, one Employer flagged that their organisation had begun building relationships with local key population civil society organisations.

Half (53%) of Employers also reported that their organisation had strengthened existing relationships with other organisations due to the Commonwealth Distance Learning programme. The types of institutions mentioned in these responses were largely similar, including universities (particularly in the UK, including the University of Leeds, University of York, and University of West London), international bodies such as the International Organisation of Supreme Audit Institutions (INTOSAI) and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), and local community organisations. However, Employers also mentioned relationships with national bodies such as the National Institute of Cancer Prevention and Research in India, and private companies who are interested in getting involved in the work of the Employer's organisation.

These new and enhanced relationships provide additional evidence of the significant benefits accrued by Employers of Commonwealth Distance Learning Scholars, creating opportunities for their organisations to develop their international partnerships and collaborations.

Perceptions of Commonwealth Scholarships

Finally, Employers were asked a series of questions regarding their perceptions of Commonwealth Scholarships and Fellowships, illustrated in Figure 3.6 below. Given the clear benefits accrued by Employers through their employee's participation in the Scholarship, as outlined in previous sub-sections, it is unsurprising that the Commonwealth programmes are held in very high regard by Employers, with almost all respondents agreeing with each of the positive statements.

Figure 3.6 – Employer perceptions of Commonwealth Scholarships and Fellowships
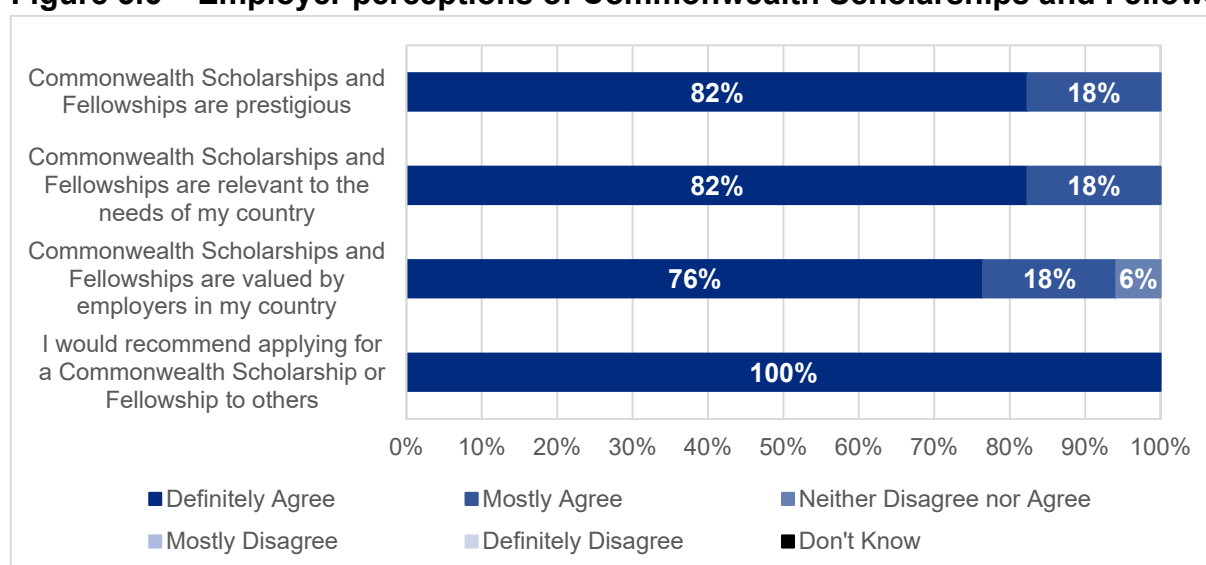
Source: Employer Survey
n = 17

Four-fifths (82%) of Employers said that they 'Definitely agree' that Commonwealth Scholarships and Fellowships are prestigious with the remainder (18%) indicating that they 'Mostly agree' with that statement. This assessment was reflected in a comment made by Dan Ndalowa regarding his perception of the programme:

'I'd say the programme is prestigious. Being in academia, and helping students, I think it's a strength to focus on the students, and value addition. I think the student raises the flag for both institutions.'

Employers also 'Definitely' or 'Mostly' agreed in the same proportions with the statement that Commonwealth Scholarships and Fellowships are relevant to the needs of their country. Three-quarters (76%) of respondents 'Definitely agree' that Commonwealth Scholarships and Fellowships are valued by employers in their country, with another fifth (18%) saying they 'Mostly agree' with that statement and only one respondent (6%) indicating that they 'Neither disagree nor agree'. Finally, every single respondent (100%) said that they 'Definitely agreed' that they would recommend applying for a Commonwealth Scholarship or Fellowship to others. Perhaps most tellingly, when asked if they would be supportive if another member of their staff sought to apply for a Commonwealth Scholarship, all Employers agreed that they would, indicating that they recognise the significant value of Scholarship, its impact on their employees' professional development, its contribution to their organisations overall, and as a tool for enhancing their international networks. For Dithan Kiragga, an alumnus of the Commonwealth Distance Learning programme, and now Employer of a current Scholar, this support is based on personal experience:

'I was a beneficiary of a Commonwealth Scholarship, and I have grown into a leader managing this $60 million contract, so the Commonwealth Scholarship was a strong benefit for me in terms of learning, exposure and in terms of giving back. Having been a beneficiary of such a course, I find myself encouraging a lot of my staff… providing mentorship, and words of wisdom. You want them to benefit from this kind of support too. My profile has been a strong incentive for a number of young professionals to aspire to achieve the same.'

Summary

Employers had overwhelmingly positive expectations for their employee's take up of a Commonwealth Distance Learning Scholarship, predicting an increase in their Scholar's knowledge and skills, an improvement in their organisation's performance, and knowledge sharing from the Scholar to other members of their staff. All Employers confirmed that their expectations had been positively met, with a few indicating their expectations had been exceeded.

Employers reported that they had observed 'Substantial' or 'Moderate' change in their Scholar's knowledge and skills across all areas in question, including research techniques, knowledge of research in their field, and technical skills, as well as soft skills such as critical thinking, leadership skills, and ability to disseminate knowledge. Employers also reported that their Scholar was

frequently applying what they were learning from their Scholarship in their work, as well as sharing that knowledge with their colleagues through informal and formal training. Employers also reported that their Scholars were frequently either making changes or advocating for changes in their workplace based on things that they were learning during their Scholarship, providing strong evidence that the Scholarship experience is having an impact on both the knowledge base of staff and the overall operation of Scholars' workplaces. These were all cited by Employers as major benefits that their organisations had derived from their employee's Commonwealth Distance Learning Scholarship.

This is further evidenced by the examples of changes provided by Employers. These include the implementation of new policies and practices, and the development of new work strands by their organisations. In instances where Employers said these types of changes had not taken place, this was largely attributed to factors outside of the control of their organisation. In some cases, this was because their organisation's work and policies were determined by external bodies such as national governments, while in others the impact of COVID-19 had limited their organisation's ability to make changes or pursue new work.

Approximately one-third of Employers indicated that their organisation had formed new relationships with other organisations because of the Commonwealth Distance Learning programme, including new international relationships with universities and multilateral bodies. Half of Employers also indicated that the programme had helped them to strengthen existing relationships with universities and multilateral bodies, as well as private companies and local and national organisations.

Employers largely indicated that they did not face significant challenges due to their employee's Scholarship. In the few instances where challenges were mentioned, these largely revolved around the need for their Scholar to manage their workload, however Employers were happy to accommodate their employees when this was necessary, and even noted that the Scholar's study programme was also frequently happy to accommodate when their obligations at work required flexibility from their courses. In rare cases Employers flagged a lack of resourcing available to make the changes that their Scholar was advocating for, or a lack of buy-in from other employees in taking up those changes.

Overall, Employers had very positive perceptions of Commonwealth Scholarships and Fellowships, strongly agreeing that they were prestigious, relevant to the needs of their countries, and valued by employers. Every single Employer who participated in the survey said that they would recommend applying for a Commonwealth Scholarship or Fellowship to others.

Expanding Horizons:
Commonwealth Distance Learning Scholarships

Growing Partnerships for Sustainable Management of Tropical Forests

Bangor University has been offering a Master's Degree in Tropical Forestry as a part-time, distance learning course since 2000. The Commonwealth Scholarship Commission has funded a total of 99 Scholars to study for this course since 2013.

The programme aims to provide students with detailed knowledge and expertise that are directly relevant to the work of a modern forest manager and those working in associated disciplines, focusing on scientific, academic, and practical principles which underpin forest management, conservation, ecosystem function and livelihoods. The part-time nature of the MSc enables students to study alongside other work or personal commitments.

Bangor University.

As part of the review into the outcomes and impact of the Commonwealth Distance Learning Programme, in-depth interviews were conducted with Dr James Walmsley, Senior Lecturer in Forestry at Bangor University, Dr Ernest Foli, Principal Research Scientist at the Forestry Research Institute of Ghana (which partnered with Bangor University in delivering the Distance Learning programme), Edwin Hara, a 2019 Commonwealth Distance Learning Scholar and Dan Ndalowa, the Scholar's Employer at the Malawi College for Forestry and Wildlife. They all shared their experiences of participating in the Commonwealth Distance Learning Programme.

Motivations and Expectations for Participating in the Distance Learning Programme

Explaining the motivations for participating in the programme from the perspective of the UK-based university provider, Dr Walmsley highlighted the desire of specific members of staff at Bangor University to improve student learning and exposure through offering an online, part-time degree programme to people who would otherwise never have the opportunity to study at postgraduate level. He also flagged the importance of engaging an international Partner from the outset who could offer an in-person component to the programme, 'It was motivated by predominantly two members of staff. We had a vision that the distance learning programme should not be entirely at distance. We're seeing that there's still incredible value from having a small, but very immersive and intense face-to-face experience. And running a tropical forestry programme, we didn't think it was defendable to do what we usually do, which is to host study tours in the UK.'

Speaking on behalf of the Partner institution, Dr Foli agreed that improving student learning and exposure was the prime motivation for the Forestry Research Institute of Ghana to partner with Bangor University in delivering the MSc Tropical Forestry distance learning programme.

Forest tour in Ghana for students and staff from Bangor University in 2019.

In addition, the potential to establish networks and research collaborations, staff development opportunities, and increasing international visibility were all cited as expected benefits of the partnership, 'The motivation stems from our mutual understanding about collaborative research, promoting the exchange of students and of academic and administrative staff and the application of learning and distance learning technologies between the two institutions. For us, it's to establish some visibility internationally and to strengthen our networking with other institutions beyond Ghana. This formed the basis for the MOU with Bangor University and then the DL programme.'

Meanwhile, Edwin Hara, a Commonwealth Distance Learning Scholar, and his employer Dan Ndalowa, found the programme attractive for different reasons. While Edwin was focused on his career development, he was not well-placed to take time off from his employment and embark on full-time studies to enhance his knowledge and skills in Forestry. Therefore, enrolling on a distance learning course gave him the required flexibility to study and work at the same time. According to Edwin, the prestige of studying at a reputable UK institution was an extra motivation for applying for a Commonwealth Scholarship scholarship for this programme, 'It's the flexibility of the distance learning course. It gives me more time to be at work and at the same time doing my studies and attending to family issues. Also, Bangor is one of the reputable institutions and I thought studying there would be of great value to my personal and professional development.'

For Dan, the potential to improve the delivery of a similar course at the Malawi College for Forestry and Wildlife based on new knowledge acquired by his employee was a compelling incentive to support Edwin to enrol in the distance learning programme, 'This was an opportunity to hear from the Scholar how the training [at Bangor University] is conducted. Using this we have been able to tailor some coursework material for the forestry and natural resource sector here in Malawi, and to learn how we can conduct our own trainings remotely.'

Origins of the Partnership

Bangor University and the Forestry Research Institute of Ghana had pre-existing ties that facilitated the formation of the formal partnership to deliver the distance learning programme. Dr Walmsley described how the partnership was formed, 'In 2014, Mark [a colleague at Bangor] and I spent ten days in Ghana meeting with staff at prospective partner organisations as well as inspecting potential facilities, field sites and accommodation. Motivations for working with [a partner in] Ghana included the English language, that it's a relatively

small country with a high diversity of tropical forests, and that it is well set up in terms of safety, logistics and travel distances. The Forestry Research Institute in Ghana is experienced in hosting national and international conferences and collaborating with partners from other parts of the world. So, in terms of the CSC, the needs of our Scholars and transparency for all those involved it's been very easy working with them. There's a Memorandum of Understanding between Bangor University and the Forestry Research Institute of Ghana, which recognises the mutual benefit, opportunity, and synergy of working together in the fields of teaching, learning, and research in relation to forestry, tropical forestry, and a commitment on behalf of both institutes to work together to develop those opportunities.'

Dr Foli added that the formation of the partnership was facilitated by long-standing personal connections maintained by several staff members at his institution, some of whom are Bangor University alumni, 'Before the distance learning programme the relations were on a personal basis, but now it's become more institutionalised. This partnership was stimulated by wanting to participate in the programme, because quite a few of us are alumni from Bangor University and have kept in touch with the staff members there. We now have a Memorandum of Understanding between the two institutions. On that basis we have been organising the summer school for the Master's Degree in Tropical Forestry programme.'

The Role of the Partners in Delivering the Distance Learning Programme

In delivering the distance learning programme, each institution has specific roles and responsibilities. As the programme coordinator at the Partner institution, Dr Foli organises Scholar activities and facilitates the interaction of students with local staff. This includes organising seminars for Scholars and lecturers from the UK university Provider to promote knowledge exchange.

The vital contributions made by their primary partner, the Forestry Research Institute of Ghana, as well as other partners of Bangor University were emphasised by Dr Walmsley, 'The role of the main partner, the Forestry Research Institute of Ghana, has been on logistics and resources in terms of staffing, academic contributions, facilities in country and providing translation services, intelligence, and access to gatekeepers. Bangor University also has a partnership with Makerere University. This has enabled a Makerere staff member with expertise in academia grounded in the context of tropical forests in Central Africa to join us in Ghana on the study tours.'

Lunch break (with food sourced from the forest) for Scholars and staff from Bangor University during a Forest tour in Ghana in 2019.

"

I have been the coordinator from the institutional side, and as per the MOU, our main task has been to organise trips and activities to expose Scholars to the various aspects of tropical forestry and to what goes on in this research institution. Apart from that we support them in the development of their work, the thesis, providing them also with background information as much as possible and encouraging them in the development of the topics and the write-up. We organise seminars at which Scholars, staff from the UK partner, and FORIG [the Forestry Research Institute of Ghana] staff present their work to each other. That kind of exposure has cross-cutting benefits in the sense that everyone involved can exchange research in ways that are meaningful and improves our own understanding of what is going on in both countries.

"

In terms of individual responsibilities, Dr Walmsley is the primary contact person and is responsible for maintaining and developing the partnership. To effectively deliver the programme, and support Scholar learning, Bangor University created a platform for lecturers to interact with students, and for students to contact and receive support from their research supervisors. The benefits of Commonwealth Scholars having access to this platform were confirmed by Edwin, 'First and foremost, the lecturers have created a platform, a facility that allows Scholars to interact with our lecturers at any time and for us the students to interact. This makes learning easy and affordable. We are now doing research dissertations and we have been allocated to supervisors to help us through the process and through the platforms, we are always in touch with our supervisors for help or assistance at any given moment.'

Dr Walmsley also highlighted that Commonwealth Scholars and Alumni play a pivotal role in supporting the partners to effectively deliver the distance learning programme. Scholars have been instrumental in stimulating collaborations between Partners and their Employers and supporting student tours and networking activities. Dr Walmsley highlighted the benefits of Scholars' diverse areas of expertise, and the ability of Alumni to mentor new students, promoting knowledge exchange.

"

Prior to starting their studies with us, all Scholars are already engaged in some way or another with governmental, non-governmental, private sector, and third sector organisations. The extensive expertise and backgrounds of our Scholars provides the basis for an incredibly rich learning experience for all involved. On the 2019 study tour in Ghana, we had one Scholar who was simultaneously a member of staff at the Forestry Research Institute of Ghana who was just finishing his dissertation. He hosted the students at the site where he was doing his dissertation, in collaboration with his employer and with another stakeholder, a butterfly sanctuary. So, the students who hadn't yet started their dissertation were able to get an insight into what it's like to engage with that part of the programme and get a sense of just what's possible.

"

Enhancing International Expertise, Networks, and Reputation Through Partnerships

Partnering to deliver the distance learning programme has offered individual and mutual benefits for Providers and Partners. The student study tours and resources provided by the partner in terms of staffing, academic contributions, and facilities and expertise in country were highlighted by Dr Walmsley as important contributions which have facilitated the effective delivery of the programme by Bangor University. The partnership has enhanced academic expertise and created a global network of Alumni, Scholars, other students, and professional experts through which international research collaborations and partnerships have been established. Dr Walmsley highlighted the importance of these international networks, 'It's great for our full-time MSc students to engage with the Distance Learning Scholars who have such diverse expertise and cultural insights to share. We have our own private Forestry at Bangor LinkedIn group, which is open to all current students and alumni.'

He added that delivering the distance learning programme in partnership with other organisations has also improved the profile and reputation of Bangor University, **'We work with the Forestry Students' Association to host online guest speaker events that are open to all our students. When we've been on the study tours, of course we've engaged with all sorts of different organisations and individuals. Working with organisations like the Forestry Research Institute of Ghana has helped us build our international network as well as raise our profile and reputation.'**

Dr Foli confirmed that the partnership has created a platform for networking opportunities and contributed to capacity building for staff, including those from other local institutions. The visibility of the Forestry Research Institute of Ghana has also increased through its participation in the programme, **'The key benefit has been networking opportunities with other scientists from Bangor University. The association has also provided us with a chance to be visible. Some of our staff have benefited in a sense that they assisted the students with data collection, and that enhanced their own capacity. In addition, the other institutions, especially from Ghana, whose staff are participating in the distance learning programme certainly benefit in that the staff come back with enhanced capacity to do better at their jobs.'**

Students and staff from Bangor University exploring the Tano Boase sacred grove in Ghana, 2019.

Impact for Scholars, Employers, and their Communities

While studying, Edwin has already started applying the knowledge and skills acquired through the programme to deliver his work tasks more effectively. He has also had opportunities to immediately transfer the knowledge gained from his studies to his local community. To develop his career, he has taken up internships to gain exposure to the work of other organisations, which has been made possible by virtue of being a Commonwealth Scholar, **'Being a lecturer, it always requires one to have more knowledge in the subject matter so that you can teach and deliver better. Studying this programme is helping me to grow academically so that I can execute my day-to-day routine work more effectively. The programme is having enormous impact on my work and profession especially on my ability to transfer knowledge and skills to students The course work covered so far by Bangor is already making a meaningful contribution to the courses I teach and the knowledge imparted into students will go a long way and benefit the whole country. At the same time, being a master's student, it has opened more opportunities for me so far. I have been exposed and participated as an intern in national forest inventories and in different projects which have allowed me to do the practical part after covering the theory of the course work.'**

Dan, the Scholar's Employer, confirmed that Edwin's expertise relating to the courses that he teaches has improved and he directly transfers the knowledge gained from the distance learning course to his lectures, improving the quality of teaching in their workplace.

He highlighted that with more staff acquiring higher qualifications and gaining exposure to different learning systems would significantly improve the service delivered by the institution in the long-term.

> I think in the short-term it's a plus to the institution to have an individual just being able to get an upgrade. And that's huge on our part because we're trying to grow and that adds value especially on the qualification side. In the long-term we see ourselves having a group of professionals who have been exposed to various learning systems. Our institution plans to incorporate what Edwin is learning now into the courses we deliver here, which would ultimately make this a better institution in the long-term.

To enable the Scholar to smoothly balance his studies alongside his work duties, Dan reduced work tasks for Edwin to create more time for studies when required the highlighted that he also offered support in the form of resources, such as internet facilities, 'We have given him the liberty to communicate when he notices that the programme's demands are high. Because we're coming from a background where we had a Scholar in the [distance learning] programme who decided to quit. We halved Edwin's tasks so that he has as much time as he can to deal with the programme needs.' Edwin confirmed the value of the support he has received from his Employer, 'The college, my employer, is taking a good part when it comes to the internet facilities which I access from my office. When I got into the study programme the principal and the teaching staff agreed to remove some of my duties from college plantation where I was attached so that I could now concentrate on the studies and do the teaching only. This allows me to finish my school assignments and tasks on time.'

Professional Development and Wider Benefits: Provider and Partner Perspectives

Dr Walmsley and Dr Foli concurred that the distance learning programme exposes the Scholars to diverse expertise and backgrounds, sharpening their technical skills and knowledge as well as their soft skills, essential for collaboration and team building. Dr Walmsley emphasised that the programme also enhances the Scholars' understanding of research practices as they gain exposure to facilities not available at their local institutions.

Dr Foli (right) with a Scholar in roots of a fig tree in Ghana, 2019.

Dr Walmsley also highlighted the benefit to Scholars of being able to immediately apply the skills and knowledge acquired from the studies to work tasks, realising better outputs, and experiencing accelerated professional advancement, 'Since doing the Distance Learning Programme, many of the Scholars have been promoted to senior positions in their organisation. And they are practising and translating much of what they learnt studying with us, into projects and initiatives and policies relating to much of what goes on in their home country in terms of forestry and land use, soil erosion,

hydrology, water utilisation, forest regeneration and sustainable livelihoods.'

Dr Foli confirmed the opportunities for career progression enjoyed by participants of the

> Often the Scholars don't have what I'd describe as the fundamentals of research skills, research training, research expertise, understanding of the principles of experimental design, appropriate statistical analysis, how to organise data, what software to use, and how to present that data. We run a module on forest inventory assessment and monitoring, and one of the things about the module is about helping students use open-source software, which allows them to identify, assess and manage forests without leaving their desk.

Commonwealth Distance Learning Programme, 'The Scholars work as technicians in the research institution and taking on the distance learning programme to enhance their capacity means that they progress to become researchers. It benefits them in the sense that it builds their capacity as staff members. The chance to work and study at the same time is an added advantage for the Scholars and without this opportunity they would not study because they wouldn't have the chance to do it full-time.'

Dr Walmsley added that through research training and mentoring provided by senior research scientists from Bangor, some Scholars have developed expertise in supervising student research projects in their own workplaces, which in turn benefits their employers.

Having a Master's qualification also increases the credibility of Scholars within the workplace, as they are 'more likely to be able to make better decisions for the betterment of the forests and people's livelihood,' according to Dr Walmsley.

Looking at the longer-term benefits of the programme, beyond the benefits to individuals, Dr Walmsley highlighted a wider contribution to the improvement of the environment and delivering Sustainable Development Goals. He emphasised that by applying the knowledge and skills gained through their studies, Scholars are contributing to raising societal awareness of environmental issues, informing decision-making, policymaking, and the adoption of more sustainable practices to improve the environment and livelihoods, 'We do believe that it's benefitting not just individuals, but also our environment, our forests, our future, and delivering on many of these Sustainable Development Goals. The number of Scholars that we've had, the diversity of professions, backgrounds, employers that they've been based within, cumulatively,

the long-term impact is, and will be, better-informed decision making, policymaking, more sustainable practices in our forests and tree landscapes across much of the Commonwealth.'

Built to Last: The Future of the Partnership

We learned from Dr Walmsley that the Commonwealth Distance Learning programme has had a positive impact on the establishment of potentially long-term relationships with Scholars and Alumni who contribute to the ongoing strengthening of the partnership, 'We have Commonwealth Distance Learning Scholars who are 'double agents' because they're also embedded in organisations such as the Forestry Research Institute of Ghana, and other institutions in Ghana. So, the partnership gives us an opportunity to work with our 'double agents', to deliver far more than we could ever possibly do if we were working with only one partner, and none of those links existed. The more established we become, the more alumni and stakeholders and partners within these organisations have buy-in and ownership of the partnership.'

Moreover, having worked with a Partner organisation to deliver the programme, and seen how effectively the Partner delivers the programme activities, Dr Walmsley reported that Bangor University plans to continue collaborating with the Forestry Research Institute of Ghana in delivering the Tropical Forestry distance learning programme, as well as in research and other areas, 'When we were in Ghana in 2019, we had several discussions with research scientists in the Forestry Research Institute of Ghana. Two of my colleagues have developed research proposals with staff [there], one was a Royal Society grant application, and that was successful. When you have partners that you can trust and you know, you're much more able to respond or develop new opportunities on the back of those. We are continuously exploring similar research opportunities with Makerere University in Uganda.'

Dr Foli also foresees more opportunities to exchange research ideas through collaborations between his institution and Bangor University. He confirmed that the distance learning programme has strengthened his organisation's ties to the UK institution, and to staff in other local institutions involved in the distance learning programme, 'As an example, the staff for the sister institutions who have been engaged in this programme now work more closely with our staff. I would say that it's strengthened the relationship between staff and the two local institutions, which is positive. Relations with the UK Provider have improved because engaging in the programme offers an opportunity to exchange ideas, research ideas, and to embark on collaborative research programmes.'

The Forestry Research Institute of Ghana also plans to establish a research centre of excellence and to provide opportunities for postgraduate training locally which will allow staff from both institutions to benefit from exchange of activities and research collaborations.

As envisaged by Dr Foli, this has the potential to create greater opportunities for teaching and learning and expanded involvement of staff in distance learning activities, either as Scholars or in delivery of the programme.

> We hope we can partner with the UK institution to strengthen our own position to be able to establish the centre of excellence. We have already reached out to the university and got some positive responses. We hope to provide an opportunity for postgraduate training, especially at PhD level, locally. Staff from both institutions will benefit because of the exchange opportunities and scientific collaboration. I can see greater opportunities for teaching and learning and expanded involvement of some of our staff. Also, opportunities for some of the staff to participate in the programme and better exchanges in terms of scientific collaboration between our team and the UK partners, especially through joint publications and research collaborations, because much is to do with research.

Section 4 – Provider and Partner Perspectives

In order to develop a full understanding of the Commonwealth Distance Learning programme, it was also necessary to examine it from the perspective of the university Providers who offer the programme of study as well as their Partner institutions who support its delivery. These viewpoints helped to paint a fuller picture of the Scholar experience, but were especially important for understanding how involvement in the Commonwealth Distance Learning programme affected the relationship between Providers and Partners.

These key stakeholders were surveyed about their experiences with the programme, their perceptions of the benefits it provides to both Scholars and their own institutions, and the nature of the partnerships between these two types of organisations. Due to the small number of respondents, the themes mentioned by Partners should not necessarily be taken as representative of the Partner experience as a whole, but merely indicative of their own personal experiences with the Distance Learning programme.

Scholar Recruitment: Methods

Providers were asked to outline how and where they recruit applicants for their programmes, both in terms of advertising and geographic region. The most common approach reported by Providers was promoting the Scholarship opportunity through existing 'Networks' (52%). These networks included both institutional 'Partnerships' (24%) with either their programme Partner institutions or other organisations such as the British Council, and individual networks including programme 'Alumni' (38%) or current 'Scholars' (14%). An example of how alumni of the study programme assist with recruitment was provided by Lucy McCombes, a Provider contact at Leeds Beckett University:

'Our alumni from our Master's course are established, mid-career professionals working in the sector who help us significantly with recruitment. For example, some of our alumni involved in recruiting for our scholarships have founded a Tourism Incubator College in Zanzibar (called Welcome Ideas), educational/conservation camps in Kenya, and the Institute of Travel and Tourism of The Gambia. And because we're recruiting people within the tourism industry, they're very helpful in identifying people who would be a good fit with doing the scholarship and sharing our vision for responsible tourism development.'

The methods or mediums used by Providers were quite varied, including 'Advertising' (38%) through print media or online, posting on 'Social Media' or the Provider's own 'Website' (24% each), and taking advantage of 'Word of Mouth' (19%). Some Providers indicated that they promoted the Scholarship opportunity at 'Events' (14%) such as recruitment fairs, conferences, or summer schools, while an equal proportion indicated that they were able to take advantage of the 'Marketing' function or department within their institutions (14%) to promote the availability of Scholarship places.

Scholar Recruitment: Geography

In order to explore the demographic trends around geography highlighted in Section 1, Providers were asked whether they targeted specific regions with their promotional efforts. While not all Providers addressed this question in their responses, those that did fell into two groups. The first group indicated that they did not do much at all in the way of regional targeting, noting that their recruitment efforts were either 'Global' (19%) or targeted at the 'Commonwealth' as a whole (10%). For James Paterson at the University of Edinburgh, expanding the opportunity for people to study at their institution as widely as possible is an important part of offering distance learning studies:

'We want to widen opportunities to allow and enable students from certainly the Global South, but from many parts of the world, to be able to do a Master's at University of Edinburgh.'

However, the second group of Providers indicated that they did make efforts to recruit applicants from specific geographic areas. For some, the focus was quite general, only broadly targeting their efforts to recruit from 'Africa' (14%). However, one-quarter of Providers indicated that they recruited from specific 'Targeted Countries' (24%). In most instances these countries were also within Africa, with Uganda, Kenya, Nigeria, and Tanzania mentioned by multiple Providers as target countries (with Ghana, Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, The Gambia, and Zambia also receiving at least one mention). In some instances, targeted recruitment also focused on areas outside of Africa with one Provider mentioning that they also specifically sought to recruit from India, Sri Lanka, and Guyana. This focus on recruitment from African countries by one-third (33%) of Providers helps contextualise why such a large proportion of Commonwealth Distance Learning Scholars are from Africa.

Two main reasons were given by Providers for why they targeted their recruitment efforts in this way. The first reason was that they were focusing on areas where their programme could have 'Development Impact' (15%), which was reflected in a particular local need related to their programme's focus. This is the approach outlined by Isla Gemmell for how the University of Manchester recruits for its Master's of Public Health programme:

'Scholars are highly likely to be selected to study for the DL programme if they clearly demonstrated in their application form how they will use the knowledge acquired to influence health improvements in their country and if they are in a position where they have the potential to influence policy changes.'

University Providers also emphasised practical considerations related to being able to offer a 'Local Face-to-Face' (15%) component at some point in the programme. Consequently, these Providers sought to recruit from areas nearby to where their Partner organisations were located, or where they had satellite campuses.

Scholar Recruitment: Gender

Gender balance was the other demographic area of interest, particularly whether Providers encountered any issues with recruiting women. When asked if they had faced any challenges in this area, nearly three-quarters of Providers indicated that they had 'None' (71%). For those Providers who did flag challenges the most commonly cited was that the 'Application Balance' (24%) was skewed with a far greater number of men applying compared to women, although many of these Providers also reported that the proportions tended to balance out after the shortlisting process. A few Providers mentioned that the 'Programme Balance' (14%) of genders was off, but in two of these instances it was communicated that for the programme as a whole there was a larger proportion of women than men. James Paterson reported that this was the case at the University of Edinburgh:

'We've got a fantastic gender mix. I think it's currently 57% or 58% female. That whole diversity of ideas, experiences, knowledge, skills, is brilliant, and the Commonwealth Scholars bring an immense amount of knowledge.'

Consequently, in these cases having a greater proportion of male Scholarship recipients actually helped to even out the gender balance of the programme overall. This points to a potential divergence between the CSC and the course Providers in how gender balance is perceived. One additional challenge that was flagged by two Providers was the issue of gender imbalance in the fields that applicants are recruited from, leading to a 'Professional Experience Pipeline' (10%) issue. This imbalance cut both ways, as in one instance the Provider flagged that most professionals are women in the field of palliative medicine that feeds into their programme, while in forestry a strong majority were men. These professional imbalances consequently skew the gender balance of both Scholarship applicants and recipients for their programmes.

Benefits to Scholars

University Providers were asked to identify what benefits they felt Commonwealth Scholars received from studying at their institution, particularly benefits which would not be available to them were they completing a similar course outside of the United Kingdom. The most frequently cited benefit was that Scholars can access the 'Expertise' of their instructors, as mentioned by two-fifths (43%) of the respondents. Similarly, Providers also highlighted the benefits of the 'Quality' of education which Scholars received (38%), as well as the longer-term career benefit of the 'Prestige' (19%) associated with an education and accreditation from their institution.

Just over one-quarter of Provider comments highlighted the 'Uniqueness' of their programmes (29%) with respect to the subject matter being covered, with particular emphasis on the fact that these courses were operating at the 'Forefront' (19%) of their disciplines. Providers also called attention to the benefits of the 'Soft Skills' (19%) that Scholars pick up, including the critical thinking, writing, and analytical skills that they acquire over the course of their studies. Finally, several Providers also cited the exposure that Scholars gained to an 'International' (29%) cohort of students in their programme, as well as the 'Networks' (19%) that are made available to Scholars both through relationships built with other students and through university alumni networks. The international component of the programme was flagged as a particular strength by James Walmsley, at Bangor University:

'The international exchange opportunity is a completely unique experience for the students as they engage with other students and organisations. It has also been about having a good communication with the scholars and managing expectations. We have students who have used the Distance Learning Programme as an opportunity to develop their careers and benefit their employers.'

Partner organisations were also asked to comment on the benefits that they perceived Scholars receiving from the programme, with particular focus on how the Partners supported them. Two Partner respondents emphasised the opportunities for practical training that Scholars received as a part of the broader Distance Learning Programme. This included research and fieldwork opportunities which Scholars gained access to through the face-to-face component of the programme provided by the Partner organisation, as well as exposure to challenges that development practitioners face in the field. Partners also highlighted the opportunities for Scholars to develop their abilities to think creatively both in response to those practical challenges as well as through the learning opportunities provided by the programme as a whole.

Partners also discussed the benefits that Scholars derive from their Scholarship after they have completed their studies, with two Partners mentioning the increased visibility that Scholars gain through their Scholarship, both internationally and within their own organisations. One Partner cited examples of Alumni who have gone through their programme receiving promotions or new postings as a result of their studies, while in other cases Alumni start new development-oriented projects based on things they have learned during their Scholarship.

Partners emphasised that their role was to facilitate the practical experiences provided to Scholars as a part of their study programme, and to provide a supportive environment by hosting face-to-face sessions for Scholars and acting as an in-country point of contact for the programme when Scholars have queries or issues. One Partner also cited their role in the recruitment and selection of Scholars as an additional way in which they support the programme.

Benefits to University Providers

Similarly, Providers were asked to provide details of any benefits that they felt Commonwealth Scholars added to their programmes, classrooms, and the learning experiences of other students in their classes. Providers' responses fell into two broad themes. The first theme revolved around the 'Geographical Representation' (43%) and 'Multicultural experience' (29%) that Scholars added to their classes. Providers emphasised that Scholars add depth to class discussions by providing insight from their international contexts, specifically by flagging challenges faced in their home countries in the areas of health, environment and climate change, as well as conflict and humanitarian issues which otherwise would be missing. This was a particular benefit flagged by James Paterson at the University of Edinburgh:

'There's unquestionably benefits from having students from different countries, and certainly the Commonwealth countries. We have students who are living in a part of the world where they have loadshedding, drought, floods, and heatwaves. So, for them to bring those experiences and to discuss issues of adaptation or how they are

trying to overcome these challenges. That is brilliant. We get those real-world experiences on climate change impacts to talk in tutorials.'

This also touches on the second theme that came out of Providers' responses, commending the 'Variety of Experience' that the Commonwealth Distance Learning Scholars bring to the table, which was mentioned by three-quarters (76%) of respondents. Working within their country contexts has also provided Scholars with unique 'Professional Experience' (24%) that they share with other students on their courses, enriching the learning experience and providing a unique benefit for all students. James Walmsley at Bangor University described this as the Scholars acting in a dual capacity:

'We have distance learning students and residential full-time students based in Bangor. And so, [DL Scholars] bring a great energy and perspective from parts of the Commonwealth. Many of them are what I describe as 'double agents', they're part-time students and they're professionals, it's brilliant for our non-scholar students to engage with them. But it's also great for our Scholars to engage with the non-scholar students because, similarly, these are people with background expertise, context, and cultural insights that they can share with the Scholars.'

Two other themes of note are worth highlighting. First, one-fifth (19%) of Providers called attention to Distance Learning Scholars' contribution to the 'Networking' component of their courses, and the strong relationships that form among cohorts over the course of their studies. The other noteworthy benefit mentioned by some Providers was the 'Cohort Support' (10%) that Scholars provided, in that the course became much more viable for the university to offer for other self-funded students due to the presence of the Commonwealth Scholars and the financial support that their Scholarships provided.

Partnerships

As outlined in the Introduction, one of the unique features of the Commonwealth Distance Learning Scholarship is that many of the Providers offer their programmes in partnership with an external organisation under a formal or informal arrangement. In some cases, the UK Providers have more than one partner, with each partner playing a different role in delivering the Distance Learning programme. Others consider the CSC to be their partner, while they have a fluid relationship with other organisations whom they invite to deliver different programme activities when required. That said, all the partnerships mentioned were pre-existing prior to participating in the Distance Learning programme. In some cases, these partnerships have been stimulated by pre-existing relationships between individuals that facilitated institutional partnerships to deliver the Distance Learning programme. Providers' motivations for creating and maintaining these partnerships for programme delivery are quite varied, including improved student learning experiences, and widening opportunities for students from diverse backgrounds. Partner organisations play a variety of roles in the functioning of the programme, including helping the Providers with programme design through the provision of local knowledge and contexts, hosting face-to-face sessions and organising study tours, promoting knowledge exchange, and helping source applicants for Scholarship places either

through direct recruitment or local advertising and promotion. This final point was elaborated upon by Lucy McCombes at Leeds Beckett University:

'We've had several partners who help with student recruitment. The first two cohorts were in the Gambia, and we partnered with the University of The Gambia, and the International Centre for Responsible Tourism in West Africa. Then we had another cohort of students from Mauritius, with the Rushmore Business School, which is a longstanding partner of the university for other courses. Recently, we have had two cohorts of students in East Africa, where we're delivering the programme in partnership with Dedan Kimathi University of Technology in Kenya, plus we have a new third cohort starting in September where we have also recruited from West Africa again with the support of the Institute of Travel and Tourism of The Gambia'

Partner organisations are similarly motivated to participate in the partnerships based on multiple factors, including the sharing of mutual goals (such as local capacity building and professional development), the pursuit of international partnerships, sharing of expertise between staff, and the desire to secure scholarship funding in the pursuit of widening local participation and outreach programmes.

Of the Providers who responded to the survey questions related to this review, half (52%) indicated that their programme was run in collaboration with a Partner organisation outside of the United Kingdom. When asked to describe the relationship between their own institution and their partner organisation, all Providers indicated that their relationship was 'Good' or 'Positive'. In one instance the Provider flagged that they had to pause the partnership due to COVID-19, as there was a need for the Partner to focus on relief work, but they were optimistic that there would be opportunities to renew the work as the pandemic passes the crisis point. Partners provided similar feedback, indicating that the relationship was 'Good' and that their involvement in the Scholarship provides a basis upon which they can grow and strengthen the partnership over time by expanding to launch additional activities.

Benefits from Partnerships

Providers were also asked to describe the benefits realised by both their own institution and that of their Partner organisation as a result of their professional relationship. The most commonly cited benefit, mentioned by just over half of respondents, was 'Knowledge Exchange' (55%), particularly the mutual exchange of expertise and sharing of best practices. Almost half of Providers also cited the 'Collaboration' (45%) that takes place between organisations, including programme development, the creation of course materials, and the authorship of additional grant proposals. 'Local Knowledge' (27%) was also cited as a significant benefit of the partnership to the university Provider, with emphasis on the better understanding of in-country contexts provided by Partners. Two Providers cited the 'Prestige' (18%) that both they and their Partners get from their involvement in the Commonwealth Distance Learning Scholarship. The same proportion of Providers also mentioned the benefits that they get from the 'Student Recruitment' (18%) activities led by their Partner organisation.

Partners were similarly asked to identify what they felt the benefits were for both themselves and for the Provider institutions that they worked with. Partners cited a number of benefits to their own organisations, including enhanced reputation and international exposure, knowledge sharing, building of academic networks, and contributing to local development through the improvement of local organisational knowledge and skills in the form of the Scholars that they hire. The ability to gain international exposure through the programme can also align with and support existing goals at Partner institutions, as is the case described by Juma Misiko at Dedan Kimathi University of Technology in Kenya:

'We have an internationalisation programme to champion the internationalisation component of our work, and to improve the visibility for our institution.'

With respect to the Provider institutions that they are partnered with, Partners cited a number of benefits that they felt the university Providers derived from the relationship. Many examples mentioned by the Partners centred around the local presence and knowledge that they offered to the Providers. These included facilities such as classrooms for face-to-face learning, visibility for the study programme within the community, and the ability to tap into local knowledge to improve their programme design. The benefit of being able to recruit applicants from within the Partner's community was also flagged, as was the ability for the Provider to ultimately have a local impact through the activities of programme Alumni after the completion of their Scholarship. Other benefits for university Providers identified by their Partners included assistance with programme design, the ability to integrate practical training into their curricula, recruitment support, and in one instance support administrating the Scholarship.

Challenges to Partnerships

In terms of any challenges faced, ten Providers provided a response to this question, with the most frequently mentioned response being that there were 'None' (40%). Aside from that, the impact of 'COVID-19' (30%) was the most significant challenge. The reported impact of COVID-19 was quite varied, ranging from the catastrophic impact of the pandemic on a Partner's country and healthcare system to the effects of broader pandemic-related travel restrictions and the inability of Scholars to participate in face-to-face sessions. This was an issue that Bangor University encountered according to James Walmsley:

'With COVID this year, we were unable to do what we usually do, which is have a tropical forestry study tour, which is where the contribution of our partner organisations, Forestry Research Institute of Ghana and Makerere University is essential and incredibly valuable.'

Respondents from the Partner organisations also largely reported no challenges encountered in their partnership or through their involvement in the Commonwealth Distance Learning programme. One Partner did flag that through their work they encountered a great demand for scholarship places, but that the Commonwealth Distance Learning Scholarship was the only funding that they

were able to direct interested individuals towards despite efforts to access additional funding sources.

Impact of Programme on Partnerships

Finally, both Providers and Partners were asked to comment on how their relationship had changed over the course of their partnerships. Once again, ten Providers provided responses, with the most frequently mentioned theme being that the organisations had developed a greater 'Familiarity' (40%) with each other through their delivery of the study programmes, citing improved mutual understanding of how each organisation operates and the development of personal relationships between staff that fostered greater trust and respect between the organisations. Approximately one-third of Providers mentioned that there was a 'Strengthening' (30%) of the relationship between Providers and Partners citing Partners' increased involvement in the delivery of their study programme, and the exploration of additional collaborations. In two instances, Providers stated that the partnership had 'Expanded' (20%), in one instance citing an additional collaboration taking place in 2022, and in the other noting that a third institution had been brought into the partnership which should lead to further joint teaching opportunities. Finally, as noted above, one Provider (10%) indicated that their partnership had been paused due to COVID-19 and the need for the Partner to focus on relief work but they were optimistic that there would be opportunities to renew the partnership in the future.

Partners who responded to the survey echoed the sentiment that their partnerships with Providers had strengthened over time. One Partner highlighted that their partnership had moved from one that was dependent on individual interpersonal relationships to one that was more institutional in nature. Another Partner cited the increased amount of academic discussion and exchange that was taking place between the institutions and including Commonwealth Distance Learning Alumni. Finally, one Partner noted how the strengthening of the partnership meant that they were able to explore further ways of collaborating within the context of the existing relationship.

Summary

University Providers recruit their Commonwealth Scholars through a variety of channels, including existing networks which include their Partner organisations, the British Council, programme alumni, as well as other Commonwealth Scholars and Alumni. Providers promote the Scholarship opportunities through advertising, social media, their own website, word of mouth, and events. While some Providers recruited from across the Commonwealth, others recruited from targeted regions or even specific countries. In the majority of cases these efforts targeted recruitment from Africa, with Uganda, Kenya, Nigeria, and Tanzania being prioritised by multiple university Providers. This helps to explain why there is such a high proportion of African Distance Learning Scholars as discussed in Section 1. Providers who did target their recruitment efforts indicated that they did so because they sought Scholars who were from areas where they would be able to have the greatest development impact, or because Scholars would be able to benefit from the face-to-face sessions that were provided by their Partner organisations or satellite campuses.

Providers largely indicated that they did not have any challenges with respect to recruiting women for Scholarship places, and for those who did they said the issue of gender balance was largely related to application volumes but that this was overcome once applications had been shortlisted. Some Providers did indicate that there were gender balance issues in their cohorts, but this included cases where there was an over-representation of women in their programme rather than

men, and that by having a greater proportion of male Commonwealth Scholars, this helped to provide greater overall gender parity in their programmes. This is a particularly interesting finding, as it surfaces a difference in how the CSC and university Providers interpret this metric.

Providers identified many benefits that Commonwealth Distance Learning Scholars receive through their programmes of study. Chief among these is the high degree of expertise that Scholars can access from their lecturers, and the quality of the education that Scholars receive through their programme. Additionally, Providers highlighted the unique and leading-edge nature of the programmes that they offered to Distance Learners. They also highlighted the long-term benefit that the prestige of an education and accreditation from their universities gave Scholars. The development of soft skills and international interpersonal networks were also important benefits that Providers mentioned.

Partner organisations generally echoed these themes, although from a more practical perspective. Partners emphasised the opportunities for practical training that Scholars received through their programmes, including unique research and fieldwork experience through the face-to-face components facilitated by Partner organisations. One Partner cited the increased visibility that Scholars achieve through their Scholarship, both within their own organisations and internationally, benefitting them by way of promotions or exploring new areas of work on the basis of their studies.

University Providers also felt that they derived a number of benefits from the presence of Commonwealth Distance Learning Scholars in their programmes. The first of these benefits was the variety of experience that Distance Learning Scholars brought into their classrooms, providing insights into the country contexts in which they have worked to other students on their courses. Providers also cited the value of the geographic representation and multicultural experience that the Commonwealth Scholars brought to their programmes, providing greater international breadth and experience to discussions. This benefit is also expressed in the broader international networks that can be accessed through the relationships created through the courses. Finally, in some instances the funding and students that Providers can access through the Scholarships meant that the courses became more viable to run for other students, both practically and financially.

Providers and Partners cited several benefits derived from their partnerships in delivering their Distance Learning programmes. These include knowledge exchange, the opportunity for collaboration, the prestige of being a part of Commonwealth Scholarships, and the sharing of mutual goals, benefiting both members of the partnership. University Providers also cited the ability to access local knowledge, the ability to host face-to-face sessions, and assistance with recruitment efforts as benefits that they received through their partnerships, while Partner organisations separately cited the ability to engage in international partnerships, the sharing of expertise between staff, and the ability to secure scholarship funding for local students as benefits. All university Providers and Partner organisations indicated that their relationships were positive, with little in the way of challenges. Many Providers and Partners indicated that their partnership has changed over time due to increased familiarity, a strengthening of the relationship between organisations, and an expansion into other areas of collaboration.

Expanding Horizons:
Commonwealth Distance Learning Scholarships

Effective Partnerships Promote Responsible and Sustainable Tourism

Leeds Beckett University offers a Master's Degree in Responsible Tourism Management. Since 2010, the Commonwealth Scholarship Commission has funded a total of 45 Scholars from Commonwealth countries to study for this course on a part-time basis, as distance learners.

Leeds Beckett University.

The course aims to complement responsible industry practices that improve quality of life and conserve the environment as well as the culture of destinations within travel and tourism. It is designed to develop the professional experience of the Scholars in tourism, heritage, and sustainable development, and equip them with skills and knowledge to implement responsible tourism strategies within marketing, operations, and product development.

MSc Responsible Tourism Management students join a Maasai Welcome dance at Tepesua cultural eco camp CBO and village for widows and vulnerable women the Narok.

Leeds Beckett University has delivered this course to Scholars in several countries in partnership with the University of The Gambia, the International Centre for Responsible Tourism in West Africa, the Institute of Travel and Tourism of The Gambia, Rushmore Business School (Mauritius), Welcome Ideas Tourism Incubator (Zanzibar) and Dedan Kimathi University of Technology, Kenya in East Africa.

The CSC Evaluation Team conducted in-depth interviews with Lucy McCombes, Senior Lecturer in Responsible Tourism Management at Leeds Beckett University (LBU) and Dr Juma Misiko from Dedan Kimathi University of Technology in Kenya, one of LBU's key Partners in delivering the distance learning programme, to understand their experiences with the programme and their ongoing partnership.

Motivations and Expectations for Participating in the Distance Learning Programme

Both the UK-based university Provider and Partner organisation shared their motivations for participating, and their expectations in delivering the distance learning programme. Lucy identified the drive to build the capacity and reputation of its existing international partner universities as one motivation for seizing the opportunity to access 'prestigious' Commonwealth Scholarships, **'The University of The Gambia and Dedan Kimathi University of Technology were interested to develop their experience in Master's provision, so that they could deliver their own Master's course eventually. For our university and the Partners, to have the prestige factor of having a recognition is good.'**

The potential to collaborate with Partners on external research outside the Scholarships also stimulated LBU's interest in delivering the distance learning course, 'Possible collaborative research opportunities between the UK and partnering countries was attractive to both sides too.'

Being part of the programme was also viewed by Lucy as an opportunity to create a platform for knowledge exchange between Scholars, lecturers, and other organisations participating in the delivery of the programme. Moreover, the study programme intended to leverage alumni networks to build Scholar capacity and improve the student learning experience, while promoting opportunities for research collaborations, 'We have a hub of alumni all over the world, and over the years that network of practitioners is valuable for us as it provides support for our current students as well as research opportunities.'

Leveraging Key Partnerships to Deliver the Distance Learning Programme

Lucy reflected on the fact that longstanding, pre-existing individual and institutional relationships facilitated partnership formation to deliver the distance learning programme.

> There's a longstanding relationship with the university and tourism partners in The Gambia, and we felt comfortable that they could support us in-country. While we have partnered with University of The Gambia, and the International Centre for Responsible Tourism in West Africa, we now also have courses we're delivering in partnership with Dedan Kimathi University of Technology, Kenya in East Africa. So, there is collaboration between partner universities plus we have our in-country contacts who are working within the industry and help with guest lectures and research placements.

She added that the reputation and ethos of Dedan Kimathi University of Technology closely matched that of Leeds Beckett University, and therefore emerged as an 'ideal' delivery partner, 'In Kenya we wanted a university that had the same reputation for sustainable and responsible tourism, and they were the first and only university that had demonstrated that subject interest. It so happened that we had connections through our alumni from the course, so we felt confident. And it's been the most successful, interestingly, in terms of efficiencies.'

LBU alumni who completed the distance learning course play a pivotal role in identifying potential Scholars for LBU to recruit and they also support course delivery.

> We are partnering with some of our alumni from our Master's course who have set up Welcome Ideas, which is a Tourism Incubator College in Zanzibar. They help us with recruitment. Our alumni network who are based in these different countries support us to identify students, and support the delivery of teaching, and support students as well in-country.

Dr Misiko confirmed that the partnership of LBU with Dedan Kimathi University of Technology was facilitated by a Commonwealth Alumnus, and that the relationship developed organically over time based on the discovery of mutual institutional interests and synergies, 'This relationship was established courtesy of the LBU student who had benefited from the Commonwealth Scholarship. LBU wanted to have one of its sessions in Kenya and they were looking at a university that can partner with them to deliver the session. We facilitated it by making the necessary logistical arrangements. But as we moved along, things evolved and they involved me to identify some of the places where the students can undertake field studies and I managed to link them to the industry in the management of the national parks and, to the private conservancies. They requested me to give a guest lecture on tourism policies from a Kenyan perspective. And from there on, we started working together. And to me, I would say that only happened because there is trust and the team has confidence in my expertise in that area, given that my research is around the Mount Kenya region. When you look at such communication and such engagement, it means that our relationship has had an impact on either side. The relationship started on a very small scale, and we started discovering what we can share, and we have a lot to share. So, based on that relationship, we are in constant communication with the LBU team, and many times we worked together on different projects which has strengthened the collaboration.'

MSc Responsible Tourism Management 2020 cohort during fieldtrip to Enonkishu Conservancy.

Best of Both Worlds: The Role of Providers and Partners in Co-delivering the Programme

In delivering the distance learning programme, Partners adopt different roles and responsibilities based on their respective contexts and strengths. Lucy highlights, for example, that Leeds Beckett University plays a pivotal role in ensuring that the course materials are easily accessible to Scholars and that course content provides multiple international perspectives, **'Having our cohorts of Commonwealth Scholars really helped us and pushed us to make sure that our content was accessible from a technological point of view, but also in terms of having multiple international perspectives on our content and our cases.'** The internationalisation of the programme is also intended to build and strengthen diverse networks, and to lay the basis for future collaborations in research and other areas.

Lucy added that apart from the academic courses offered as part of the study programme, LBU provides additional support to Commonwealth Scholars to strengthen their wider skillsets, which are critical to their success in the programme, **'The other journey alongside doing a Master's course for some students is to get up to speed with skills such as critical thinking, referencing and using databases which we support them with.'** Additional support includes access to recorded lecture sessions and providing a platform for Scholars to meet virtually and network, **'We have several contact points, such as the online course and weekly live lounges, that's live teaching where all our students come together. These sessions are also recorded so that the students who are unable to attend can catch up.'**

MSc Responsible Tourism Management students speak to Maasai herders about their involvement with tourism and sustainable rangeland project run by Mara Training Centre.

Meanwhile, Dedan Kimathi University of Technology, as a partner organisation, has been instrumental in organising Scholar tours which offer practical learning and exposure for students while promoting interaction and knowledge exchange between Scholars and local tourism practitioners. Lucy highlights the importance of this practical element of the course, **'We rely on our partner institutions for the local in-country protocol in terms of delivering education overseas.'**

MSc Responsible Tourism Management 2019 cohort with hosts at DeKUTS campus in Nyeri.

Dr Misiko confirmed how the role played by Dedan Kimathi University of Technology in delivering the programme contributes to student learning and knowledge exchange, 'We are expecting a visit from Leeds Beckett University to Kenya to deliver a session, and it does add a lot of value because these students are drawn from different corners of the world to come and experience the tourism and interact with the practitioners. Having the tours around the mountains and seeing the sustainability initiatives is a very rare opportunity to enhance the students' understanding of the subject. The tours also create an opportunity for the students to interact and learn from each other, and for our faculty members to interact with the other experts and exchange knowledge, particularly on the trends in the industry and they learn from each other.'

Internationalisation and Networks: Benefits for Providers and Partners

Participating in the Commonwealth Distance Learning programme has seen Providers and Partners realise individual and mutual benefits. From Lucy's perspective, the internationalisation of the online course delivery by LBU has contributed to improving the curriculum and the quality of teaching, while providing a platform for the wider student body to establish international networks.

> Having our cohorts of Commonwealth Scholars helped us with internationalisation of the course and it keeps us on our toes in making sure that we weren't ethnocentric in terms of our curriculum and delivery. It's also been helpful in terms of networks, all our students [full-time or part-time] take part in these networks and they benefit from having that exchange of perspectives. We also invite other students (who are not from the Commonwealth countries) to join the field trips, so that they can then interact and benefit from learning about responsible tourism in the destination of our Commonwealth Scholars.

By facilitating the recruitment of Scholars, supporting programme delivery through hosting tours, and guiding current students on their field work, alumni of the programme add substantial value to the course and this has had an overall positive impact on the reputation of LBU, as Lucy explained, 'Our alumni in-country are very helpful in identifying people who would be a good fit for the programme and because we're recruiting people within the tourism industry who are established mid-career and senior professionals working in the sector, it helps us be perceived very positively from our industry partners and students.'

Similarly, Dr Misiko mentioned that partnering with LBU to deliver the distance learning course has contributed to establishing more international research collaborations, increased networking opportunities for students and staff, and consequently increased the international visibility of Dedan Kimathi University.

> We have an internationalisation programme which depends on students having collaborative working relationships with students from other universities. So, working with LBU in the delivery of this programme, to us it is a plus because it's from there that we generate these collaborations.

He added that the study programme creates a platform for networking and this contributes to personal development, 'Scholars can undertake joint research and mentoring of young researchers. And in that process, you find that apart from developing personal goals it offers an opportunity to increase their network and to learn from each other.'

Benefits of the Distance Learning Programme to the Scholars and their Communities

Partners felt there were many benefits of the programme to Scholars. Lucy highlighted that for some Scholars it is a prerequisite to acquire a Master's qualification to be considered for a promotion in their employment, 'Scholars who are recruited from educational institutes in Kenya need a Master's to be promoted to a more senior teaching role. So, it's a requirement to have a recognised Master's.' The prestige attached to getting the Master's qualification through a Commonwealth Scholarship is yet another benefit for the Scholars and their employers. The Scholars also use the acquired skills and knowledge in their current roles to deliver their work tasks more effectively. For example, application

of research findings to improve practices or to apply different approaches at workplace, application of knowledge to influence policy and strategies for address community problems, and improved work skills such as report writing skills, as Lucy explained, 'One Scholar is working at a national parks in Tanzania and he was doing his research on the impact of tourism on the wildebeest migrations, to see how the accommodation and infrastructure was influencing those movements. He's got some research findings and recommendations for accommodation for tour operators on how to avoid interfering with their movements. So, he's directly applying his research to his role. Some of the candidates who are working for the local government, the local tourist board or the Ministry of Tourism have got promoted to roles where they are involved in policy and strategic planning. Here they apply their improved report writing skills. And in the government, to have a recognised UK Master's in your field does have that prestige attached, and it equips them with skills on how they might apply a different approach to doing tourism through the workplace. Some Scholars from the industry use knowledge gained to increase the benefits their local communities get from Tourism, while others will address an issue in the community, hence it is an applied course to their respective contexts.'

From Lucy's observations, obtaining a Master's qualification has also opened avenues to acquire higher academic qualifications and therefore career progression for some Scholars, 'We also have several students who are now going on to PhDs following their Master's studies.'

When asked about his perceptions on the benefits of the distance learning programme to the Scholars, Dr Misiko felt the course was relevant to the Scholars' work tasks as most Scholars are in positions where they influence policy to champion sustainable tourism development. Therefore, they can build on what they learn and make a change in their organisation or communities, 'One of the students from Kenya was a very senior government official in the Ministry of Tourism, a position where they influence policy. There were also two other students, again from Kenya working for a very reputable organisation championing sustainable tourism development in Kenya, they put into practice and build on what they have been taught which will make their organisations successful. The course equips students with novel skills and knowledge that they use to go out and try new models and approaches to solving societal problems.'

Student exposure to diverse ways of learning was also commended by Dr Misiko for giving the students an opportunity to interact with each other and share knowledge, 'The connectivity of students and the establishment of networks and connecting with the industry is important. For those taking on PhD studies following their Master's, they can use the established networks to help them grow not only in their career, but also boost the image of their institution by virtue of having studied in a university in UK.'

He added that the long-term impact of the programme to Scholars will be visible in terms of policy outputs produced to inform development and the active participation of the students in policy discussions.

Looking Ahead: The Expected Long-Term Impact of the Distance Learning Programme From the Perspectives of the Partners

Lucy highlighted that the engagement of LBU in delivering the distance learning programme has strengthened the pre-existing relationships with its Partners and also promoted the establishment of potentially long-lasting relationships between UK academics, industries, and practitioners who will continue to collaborate in devising and implementing more sustainable approaches and policies to make a change in society. 'The networks and the relationships that we've been able to build between our academics, and industries, and practitioners in a destination, all working in tourism have also embraced a more sustainable approach to doing things. I now see it happening that they are working together, doing new policies, or new products, or new approaches, and then they're working together and applying this change. And I feel motivated that I can see people doing things differently as a result.'

"

The long-term impact would be sustainable research and networks. Because when we create very strong research or scholarly networks, those networks are to outlive our lives. I will not be there, but because of the relationship and the framework that guided the framework exist, and the two institutions will be able to work, there will always be a collaboration.

"

Dr Misiko Juma concurred with Lucy adding that very strong research or Scholarly networks have been created as a result of participating in the distance learning programme, and that establishing frameworks for guiding the partnership will ensure continued collaborations.

The Future of the Partnership

Strengthening collaborations and the partnership emerged as a top priority for Dedan Kimathi University of Technology. This would involve exploring the possibility of joint student supervision to enrich student research outputs or sharing expertise with partners on curricula review to achieve a globally competitive curriculum. Currently, possibilities for joint research and how to share expertise, and jointly seek funding for proposed activities are being explored. Other planned future activities include staff exchange to share knowledge and expertise and exploring the possibility of offering a similar study programme at partner institution as Dr Misiko explained, 'We were moving towards planning future collaborative activities. One of the activities is to strengthen the partnership. And therefore, we're looking towards a programme for exchange of academia. We are looking at the possibility of offering similar programme here in Kenya, so we are planning to have a faculty member from UK coming to Dedan Kimathi University of Technology and being able to spend some time working within the Institute of Tourism and Hospitality Management sharing their expertise, under a formal arrangement, that is. Also, we see the same happening where we have the faculty member travelling to UK to offer their expertise, and dissemination of their knowledge. So that was something that we were really exploring as part of strengthening the collaboration. Because we have graduate students, we are also exploring the possibility of joint supervision. We want to complement each other as partners, rather than looking at ourselves as competitors. We have started exploring possibilities of joint research, we came up with a clear framework on how to work together and share the expertise, and possible benefits coming out of that. We are situated in central part of Kenya, near Mount Kenya and in the northern corridor where new forms of tourism are coming up. That provides an interesting field of research to leverage and a good opportunity to pursue.'

Section 5 – Alumni Outcomes

An important part of the CSC's work is to evaluate the outcomes of its Scholarships once Scholars have completed their studies and become Alumni. These outcomes are measured primarily through the CSC's longitudinal evaluation framework which asks incoming Scholars to fill out a pre-Scholarship Baseline survey as a point of comparison, and then five post-Scholarship Alumni surveys, administered every two years after they have completed their Scholarship, to investigate changes that occur over this ten-year period.

This section first examines the rates at which Scholars opt for the different programme completion outcomes available to them as Commonwealth Distance Learners. It then examines a number of thematic areas covered by the Alumni surveys including skills and knowledge development, residency status, employment status, additional qualifications gained, use of skills and knowledge from their studies, involvement in teaching, academic research, innovation and the development of new projects and work, and frequency of contact with various networks. An exploration of these themes provides a thorough overview of the professional and academic experiences of CSC Distance Learning Alumni in the post-Scholarship period.

Programme Completion

As discussed in previous sections, one of the unique aspects of the Commonwealth Distance Learning scheme is that many recipients choose to study part time. Consequently, Scholars have a five-year timeframe for funding and completion of studies compared to the one-year window for other CSC-funded Master's programmes. A consequence of this feature is that there is a significant lag in outcome reporting compared to other programmes. This can be seen in the proportion of Scholars, awarded a Scholarship in 2019 or before, who are still studying or otherwise have a result pending, as displayed in Figure 5.1 below.

Figure 5.1 – Study outcomes by year
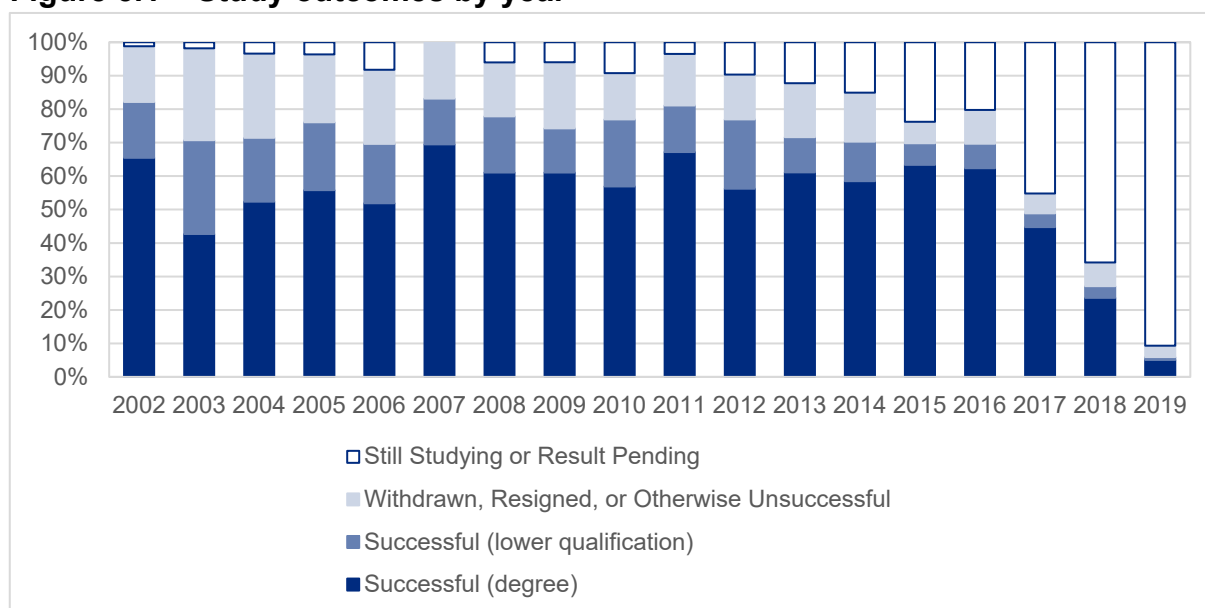
Source: CSC award data (2002-2019)

On average, three-fifths (59%) of Distance Learning Scholars successfully exit the programme with a Master's degree (based on the period 2002-2016). However, in addition to the provision for part-

time study, the Distance Learning scheme is unique among the CSC's Scholarship programmes in that it allows Scholars the option to exit the programme with a certificate or diploma rather than the full degree. In these instances, the Scholar's funding ends, and they are recorded as having successfully completed the programme with a lower qualification. From the period 2002-2016 this route was chosen by approximately one-sixth (16%) of Scholars. While there is not definitive data on why Scholars exit their programme prior to completing their full degree, there is some information that can be gleaned from the Distance Learning Scholar survey.

In their survey responses, Scholars who exit early cited three main reasons for not continuing their programme to the full degree. Often the Scholar has had other unexpected obligations appear in their life, either personal or professional, preventing them from completing the programme in full. Other Scholars highlighted issues such as unreliable internet, financial constraints, or an inability to find an appropriate supervisor for their dissertation. Finally, some Scholars reported that they had gained the knowledge and skills that they wanted from the course as a supplement to other the skills and training that they already held, and so were happy to exit the course prior to attaining the degree accreditation. The fact that a significant minority of Scholars take these earlier pathways to exit the programme demonstrates the value that this flexibility provides.
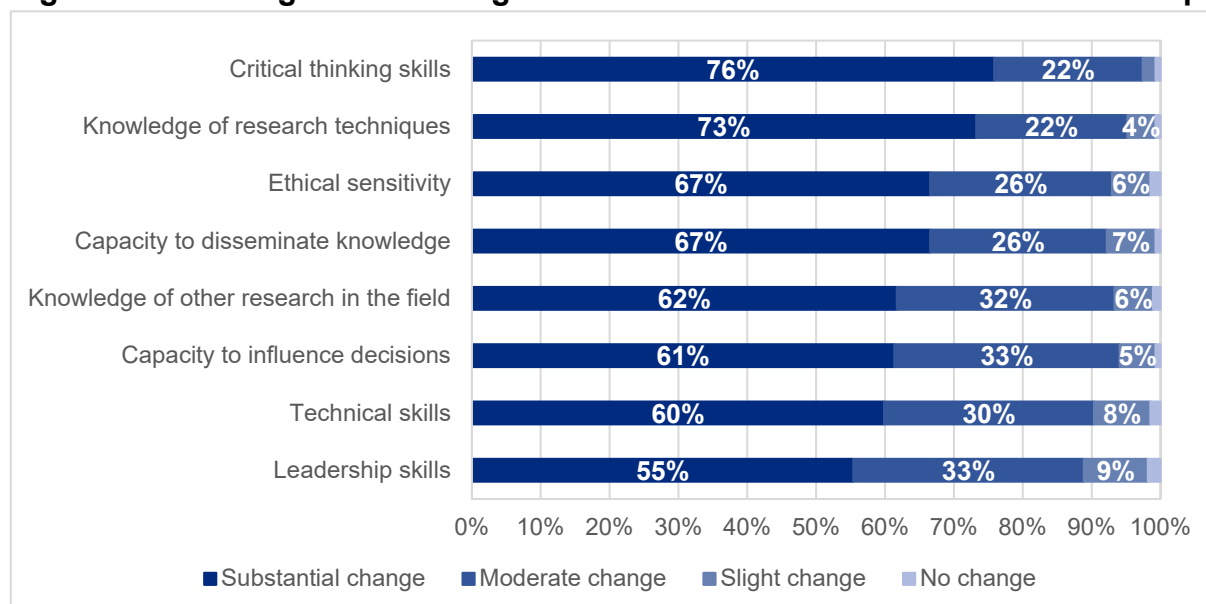
Of the remaining Scholars during the 2002-2016 period, another sixth (16%) are recorded as having withdrawn, resigned or were otherwise unsuccessful in completing their Scholarship. This category captures a number of different reasons for unsuccessful outcomes including personal circumstances, academic difficulties, and health issues. These echo many of the reasons cited by Scholars who left the course with a certificate or diploma, but these Scholars had unfortunately not met the requirements to leave with an accreditation.

The final category of outcome illustrated in Figure 5.1 is still studying or result pending. In these instances, the Scholar is either still completing their studies, or the CSC is awaiting official confirmation of the outcome of the Scholarship from the institution of study. However, it is important to note that this category includes Scholars who have already achieved lower qualifications but are still studying. For example, over one-quarter of the 2019 Scholars within the 'still studying or result pending' category have already achieved a certificate but are continuing with their studies towards a degree accreditation.

Knowledge and Skills

In their first post-Scholarship survey Alumni are asked to reflect on the extent to which their Commonwealth Scholarship developed or enhanced their knowledge or skills. Almost all Alumni reported that they had realised 'Substantial' or 'Moderate' change across all categories. As illustrated in Figure 5.2, critical thinking skills was the area with the highest reported rate of development, with virtually all respondents reporting either a 'Substantial' (76%) or 'Moderate' (22%) change in this area. Knowledge of research techniques was also reported to have changed at similarly high rates.

Figure 5.2 – Change to knowledge or skills due to Commonwealth Scholarship

Skill	Substantial change	Moderate change	Slight change
Critical thinking skills	76%	22%	
Knowledge of research techniques	73%	22%	4%
Ethical sensitivity	67%	26%	6%
Capacity to disseminate knowledge	67%	26%	7%
Knowledge of other research in the field	62%	32%	6%
Capacity to influence decisions	61%	33%	5%
Technical skills	60%	30%	8%
Leadership skills	55%	33%	9%

Source: Longitudinal Alumni Surveys (2017-2020)

n = 239

*Only asked at +2 years mark.

The lowest rates of change were reported in technical and leadership skills, however the majority of respondents still reported 'Substantial change' in these areas (60% for technical, 55% for leadership) with most of the remainder reporting 'Moderate change' (30% and 33% respectively).

Residency

A common issue with international scholarships is that they can lead to an exodus of recipients from their home countries to higher-income countries. However, Commonwealth Distance Learning Alumni have largely remained resident in their home countries and regions in the ten-year period following their Scholarship, as illustrated in Figure 5.3.

Figure 5.3 – Post-Scholarship residency status
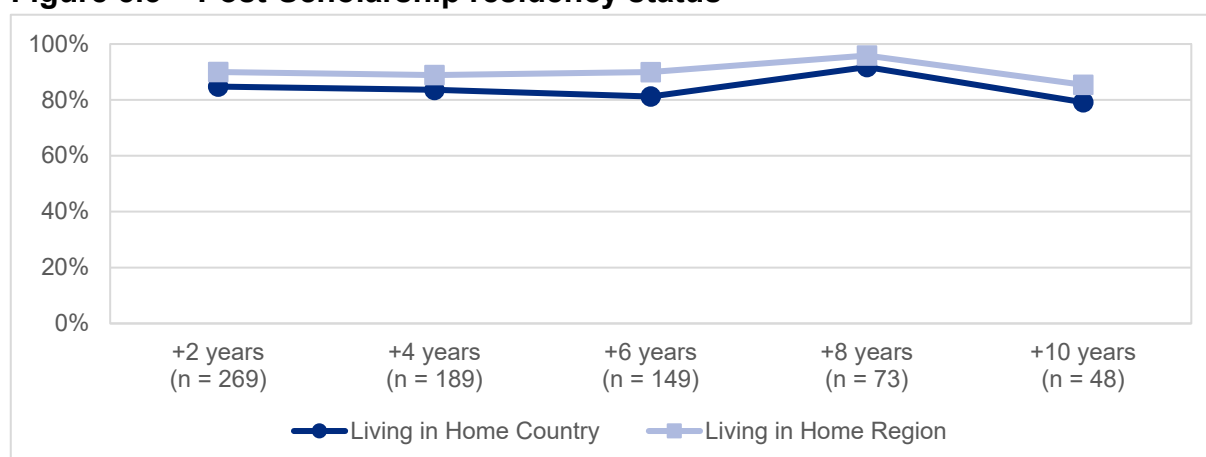
Source: Longitudinal Alumni Surveys (2017-2020)

Approximately four-fifths of Distance Learning Alumni remain in their home country across all data collection points, with the lowest reported rate of home residency at 10 years (79%) and the highest at 8 years (92%). However, in many instances where Alumni are no longer living in their home country they are still living and contributing to development within their home region. This is

reflected in the fact that their residency ratio is even higher when looking at Alumni's region of residence. Taken together, these two trend lines show that a large majority of Alumni continue to live in their local area post-Scholarship, largely avoiding the issue of brain drain often associated with international scholarships.

Employment was the primary reason given by Alumni who were living abroad, be it permanent or temporary. Studying abroad was the other major factor, particularly for the first six years post-Scholarship. With respect to their intentions to return to their home countries, across all data points most Alumni's intentions are to return home within four years from the point of completing the survey.

Overall, this provides strong evidence that Distance Learning Alumni remain dedicated to contributing to their home country and region, and that any post-Scholarship mobility is both temporary, and largely driven by career development (be it employment or study).

Employment Status

The employment of Distance Learning Scholars and Alumni follows a distinct pattern from pre-Scholarship to the 10-year mark post-Scholarship. At the pre-Scholarship Baseline, just under nine-tenths (88%) of Scholars reported that they were employed, with another handful (5%) reporting that they were both employed and studying. This then largely continues over the course of Scholars' study period as discussed in Section 2 (see Figure 2.2 in particular) where almost all Scholars reported being involved in some form of employment.

Figure 5.4 – Employment status
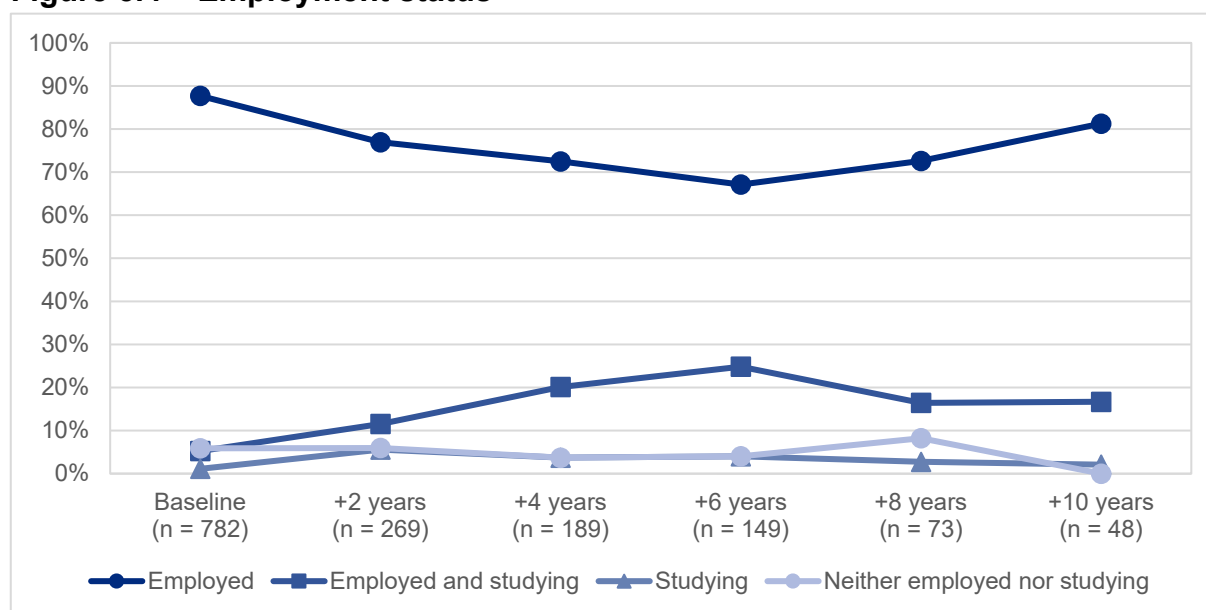
Source: Longitudinal Baseline and Alumni Surveys (2017-2020)

In the first six years of the post-Scholarship period, a progressively greater proportion of Alumni move from being employed to being both employed and studying. This change peaks at the 6-year point, when one-quarter (25%) of Alumni are both employed and studying, while two-thirds (67%) of Alumni are solely employed, before the trend reverses.

Distance Learning Alumni's ongoing pursuit of education and training is further evidenced by the fact that approximately two-fifths of respondents indicate that they have received an additional

qualification within the two years prior to completing the survey across all data points, except for the 6-year mark which saw a peak of nearly half (see Figure 5.5).

Figure 5.5 – Gained additional qualification(s) within past two years
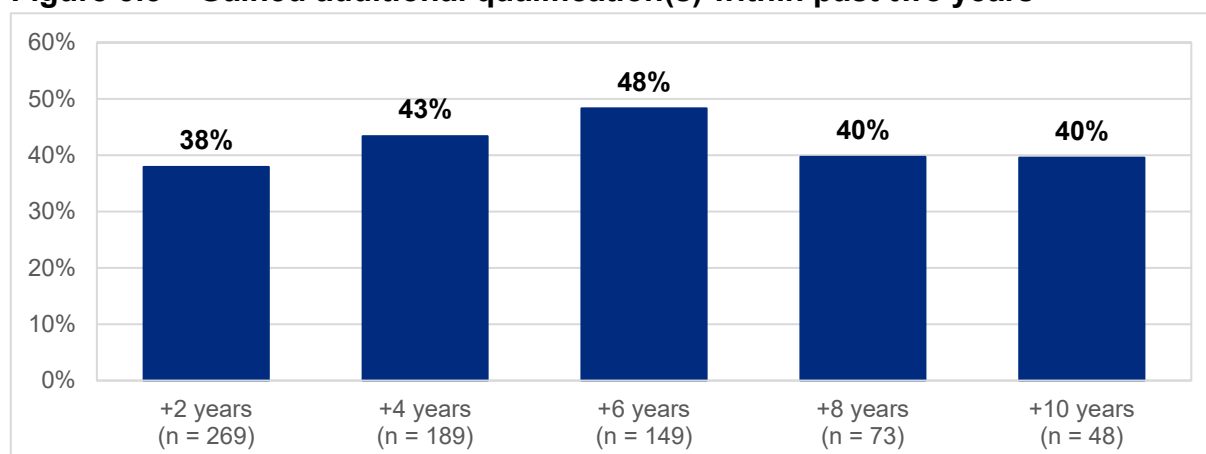
Source: Longitudinal Alumni Surveys (2017-2020)

'Technical training' (35%) and 'Professional accreditation' (31%) were the most likely types of qualifications gained by Distance Learning Alumni who reported having done so after their Scholarship. One-quarter (26%) reported gaining some 'Other' qualification, while approximately one-sixth reported gaining an additional 'Master's degree' (17%) or a 'Doctorate' (15%), while five Alumni reported gaining an additional 'Undergraduate degree' (2%).[18]

For those Alumni who have gained additional qualifications, just over three-fifths indicated it would have been 'Unlikely' (37%) or 'Very unlikely' (25%) that they would have gained those qualifications without their Commonwealth Distance Learning Scholarship, while the remaining two-fifths reported it would have been 'Likely' (27%) or 'Very likely' (12%).[19]

For those respondents who reported that they were employed or employed and studying, they were also asked in which sector they were primarily employed, illustrated in Figure 5.6 below.

---

[18] n = 304. Source: Longitudinal Alumni Surveys (2017-2020). Note: Respondents could report gaining multiple qualifications, so figures add up to over 100%.
[19] n = 304. Source: Longitudinal Alumni Surveys (2017-2020).
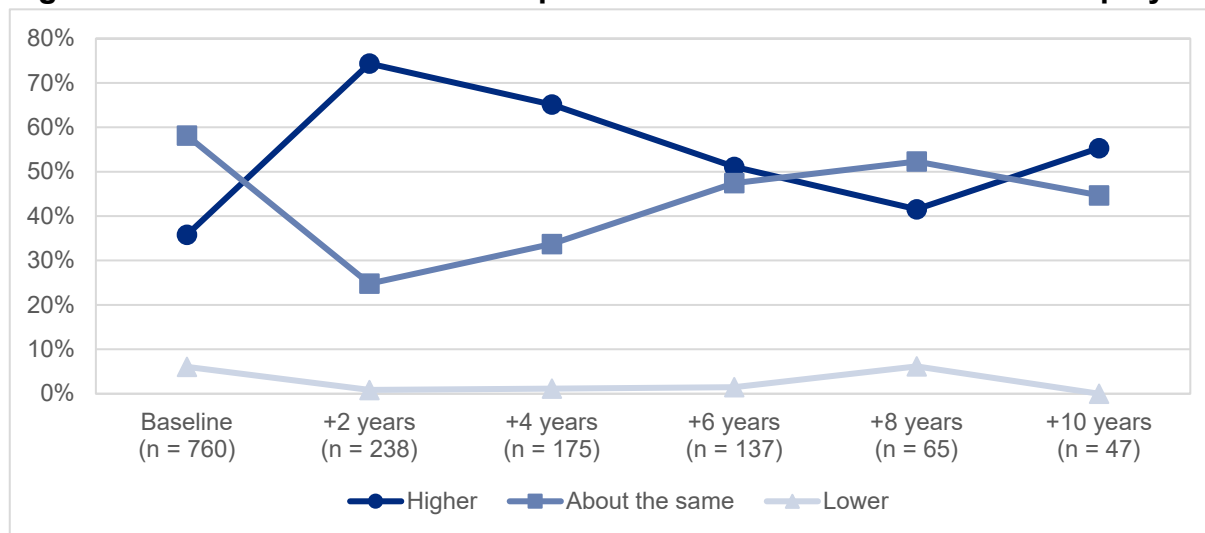
Figure 5.6 – Sector of employment
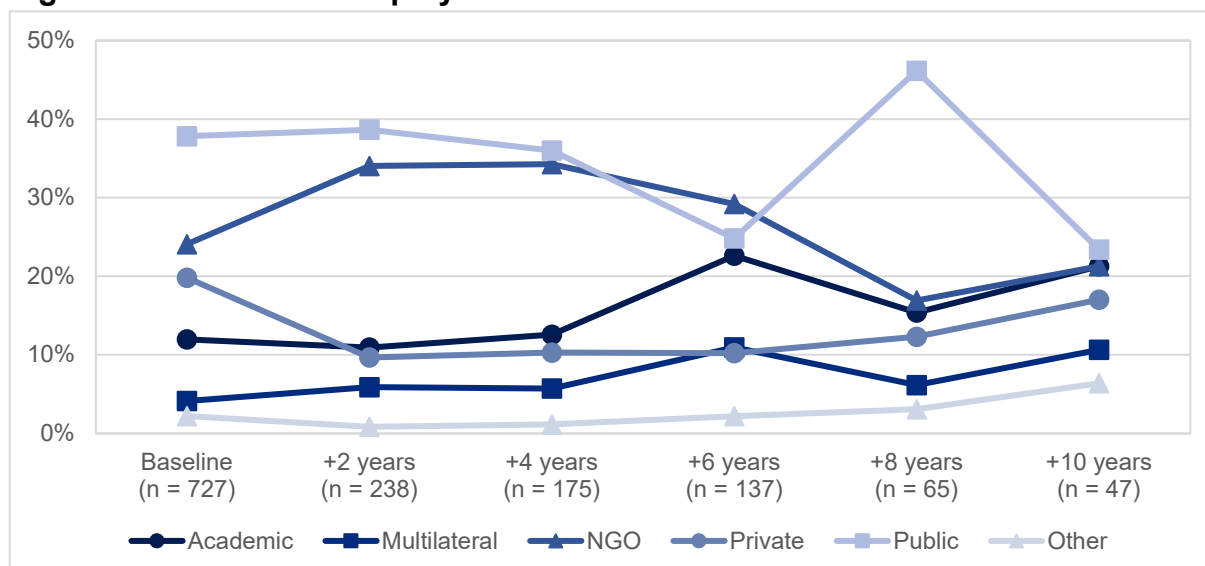
Source: Longitudinal Baseline and Alumni Surveys (2017-2020)
*Only asked if respondent was 'Employed' or 'Employed and studying'.

Pre-Scholarship, the Public and NGO sectors were the two largest employers of Scholars (38% and 24% respectively), with another fifth (20%) of employed Scholars indicating that they worked in the Private sector before their studies. Immediately post-Scholarship, most sectors remain consistent, with the exceptions of the NGO and Private sectors where there is clear movement away from the Private sector and clear movement into the NGO sector in the first two years. The resulting proportions then remain stable until the 6-year mark at which point there begins to be movement away from both the Public (25%) and NGO (29%) sectors and into the Academic (23%) and Multilateral (11%) sectors. The 8-year mark appears to be an outlier given the massive spike in Alumni reporting employment in the Public sector, particularly given the return to proportions more in line with the overall trends at the 10-year point.

An important indicator of the impact of the Distance Learning Scholarship on Scholars' skills development is how their skill levels compare to the skills needed for their current role. This is illustrated in Figure 5.7 below.

Figure 5.7 – Current skill level compared to skills needed for current employment[20]

Source: Longitudinal Baseline and Alumni Surveys (2017-2020)
*Only asked if respondent was 'Employed' or 'Employed and studying'.

Pre-Scholarship, three-fifths (58%) of Scholars reported that their skill level was 'About the same' as that required for their current employment, while one-third (36%) reported that their skill level was 'Higher'. Upon completion of their Scholarship however, these proportions change completely with three-quarters (74%) of Alumni reporting that their skill set was 'Higher' than that required for their job at the 2-year mark compared to only one-quarter (25%) who felt that their skills were 'About the same' as required for their job. This provides a clear indication that Alumni had experienced significant development in their skill sets during the Scholarship period. As time passes, the ratio of Alumni who report that their skill set is 'About the same' climbs while the proportion of those who say it is 'Higher' comes down. This is to be expected as Alumni progress in their careers and move into more senior positions.

Application of Knowledge and Skills

Commonwealth Distance Learning Alumni reported substantial and enduring use of the knowledge and skills that they learned from their Scholarship across multiple contexts. When asked how frequently they make use of knowledge or a skill from their studies in their employment, nearly all respondents indicated that they do so 'All the time' or 'Often' across all data points post-Scholarship (see Figure 5.8).

---

[20] Note: This question was asked to Baseline respondents who were either employed at the time of responding, or who had been employed within the past two years.

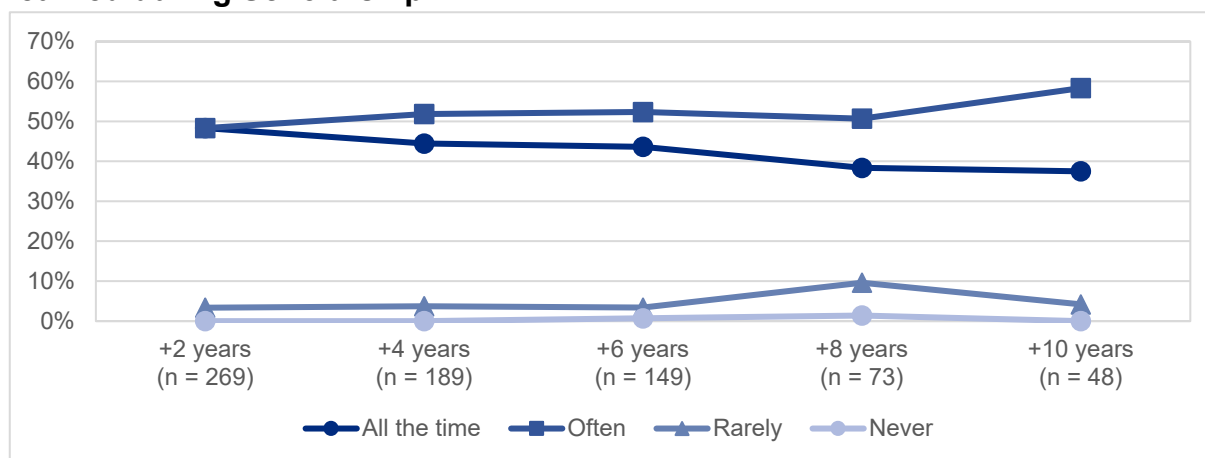**Figure 5.8 – Frequency of use of knowledge and skills in employment**
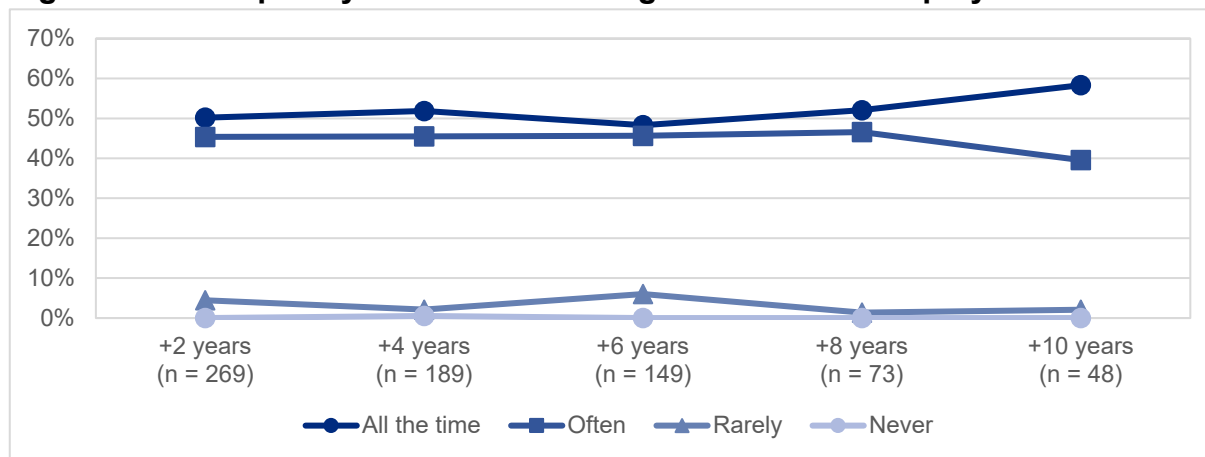
Source: Longitudinal Alumni Surveys (2017-2020)

In fact, well over nine-tenths of respondents indicated that they did so 'All the time' or 'Often' across all data points, indicating that Alumni frequently and consistently use the knowledge and skills from their Scholarship in the first decade after completion, with no indication of decay in the applicability or utility of what they learned.

A similar pattern emerges when it comes to approaching problems in a different way because of something Alumni had learned in their studies, with almost all respondents again responding that they did so either 'All the time' or 'Often', as illustrated in Figure 5.9.

Figure 5.9 – Frequency of approaching a problem in a different way because of something learned during Scholarship
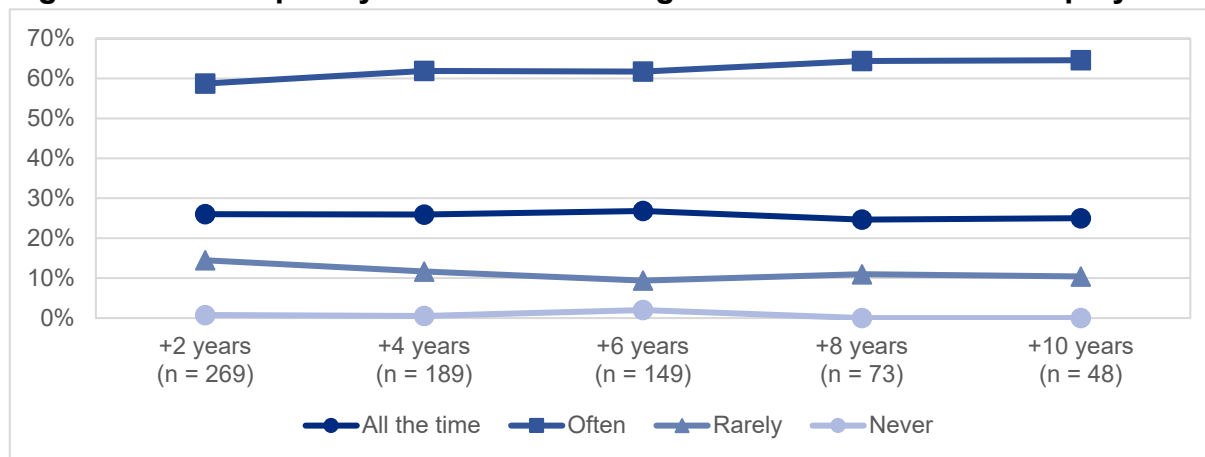

Source: Longitudinal Alumni Surveys (2017-2020)

Once again respondents reported a high frequency of approaching problems differently due to their Scholarship across the entire ten-year period post-Scholarship, with a minimum of nine-tenths reporting that they did so 'All the time' or 'Often' across all data points.

Alumni also reported frequent use of what they learned during their Scholarship outside of their employment. As illustrated in Figure 5.10, the vast majority of respondents indicated that they did so 'All the time' or 'Often' across all data points.

Figure 5.10 – Frequency of use of knowledge and skills outside of employment
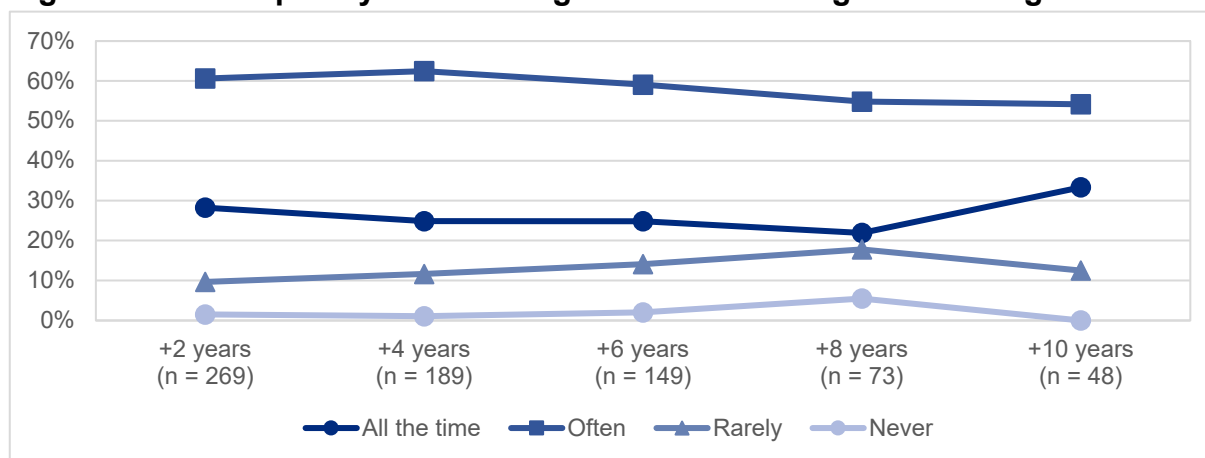

Source: Longitudinal Alumni Surveys (2017-2020)

Together these three graphs show that the knowledge and skills that Commonwealth Distance Learning Scholars acquire during their Scholarships are put to frequent and continued use in the first ten years post-Scholarship, demonstrating ongoing relevance and utility of their studies.

Sharing of Knowledge and Skills in the Workplace

As was the case while they were studying and working during their Scholarship, Commonwealth Distance Learning Alumni continue to frequently teach things that they learned during their studies to colleagues in their workplaces throughout the post-Scholarship period (see Figure 5.11).

Figure 5.11 – Frequency of knowledge and skill sharing with colleagues
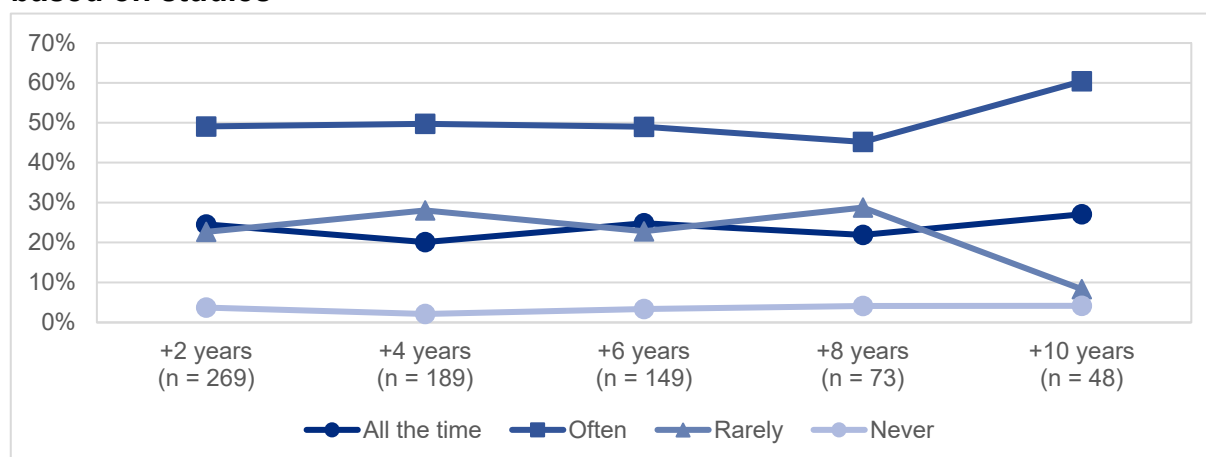

Source: Longitudinal Alumni Surveys (2017-2020)

A minimum of three-quarters of Alumni indicated that they taught something they learned during their Scholarship to their colleagues 'All the time' or 'Often' across all data points, clearly indicating that a large majority of Commonwealth Distance Learning Alumni are consistently sharing knowledge from their Scholarship with their co-workers for at least a full decade after the completion of their studies.

Similarly, a minimum of two-thirds of Alumni reported that they developed training resources or guidance for others based on their studies across the post-Scholarship period, as illustrated in Figure 5.12 below.

Figure 5.12 – Frequency of development of training resources or guidance for colleagues based on studies
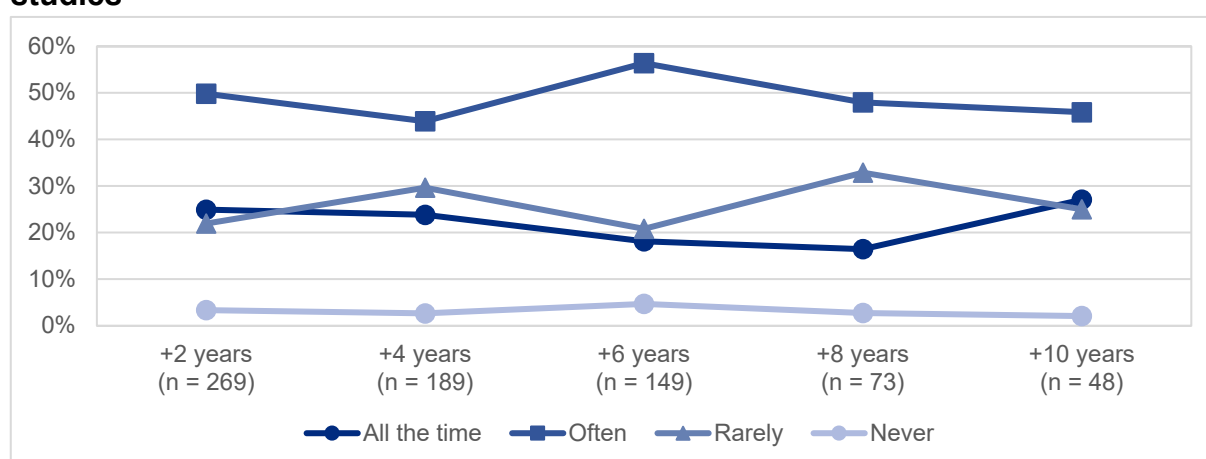

Source: Longitudinal Alumni Surveys (2017-2020)

While Alumni reported that this occurred less frequently than the informal training discussed above, the majority of Alumni still reported that they were engaged in this activity 'All the time' or 'Often' across all data points. Similar to the informal on-the-job training illustrated in Figure 5.11, the rate of this activity did not diminish over time.

Advocating for Changes in the Workplace

As was the case for Scholars who were working during their studies, Alumni continued to make and advocate for changes within their organisation's working practice based on what they learned during their Scholarship. As can be seen in Figure 5.13, a minimum of two-thirds of respondents indicated they made these changes 'All the time' or 'Often' over the first ten years post-Scholarship.

Figure 5.13 – Frequency of making changes to organisation's working practice based on studies
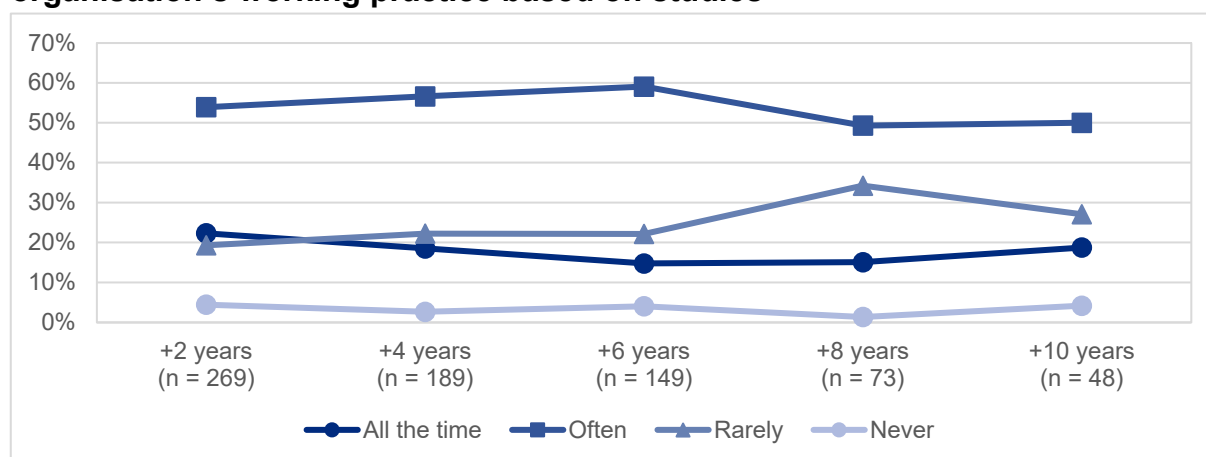

Source: Longitudinal Alumni Surveys (2017-2020)

Conversely, only a small fraction of respondents (5% or less) reported that they 'Never' engaged in this activity across the same timeframe.

Similarly, Alumni continued to encourage their senior managers to make changes at a similar rate reported by Scholars during their studies (see Figure 2.6). Once again, a minimum of two-thirds of respondents indicated that they encouraged their senior manager to make changes 'All the time' or 'Often' across all data points, as illustrated in Figure 5.14.

Figure 5.14 – Frequency of encouraging senior managers to make changes to organisation's working practice based on studies
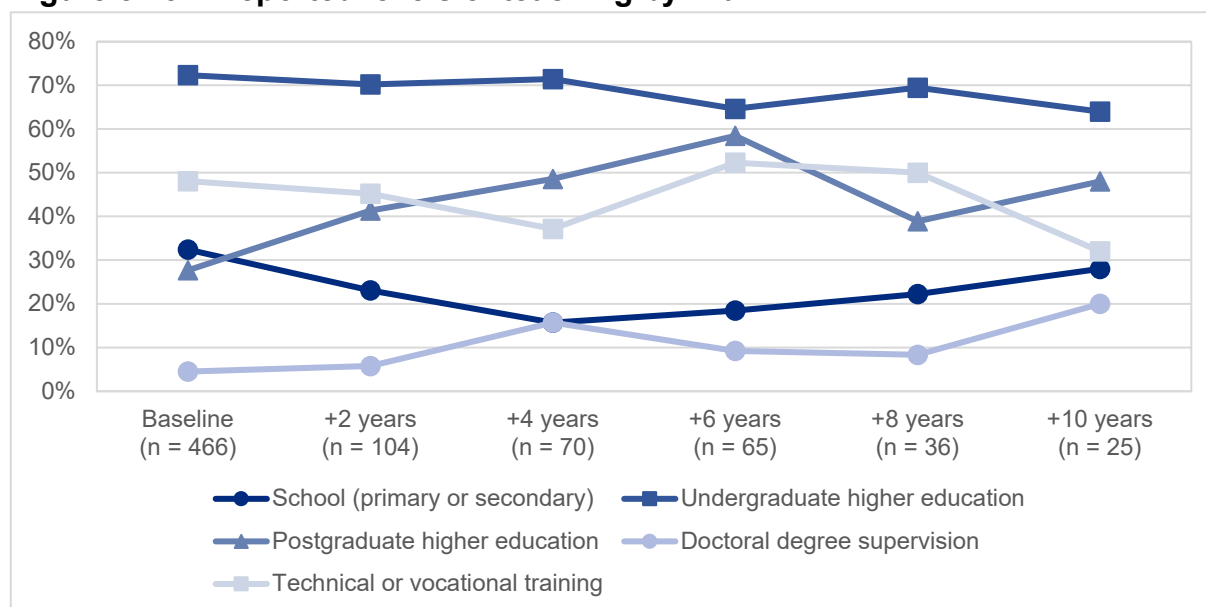

Source: Longitudinal Alumni Surveys (2017-2020)

As was the case when it came to making changes themselves, very few Alumni (less than 5%) indicated that they 'Never' did this across all data points. This reinforces the case that Commonwealth Distance Learning Alumni are actively transferring their learning into workplace practices over the first ten years post-Scholarship, leading to broader organisational benefits.

Teaching

On average, half of Alumni reported that they were involved in teaching students as a part of their jobs, over the first ten years post-Scholarship. These Alumni reported that the level of teaching responsibilities they held varied significantly over time, as illustrated in Figure 5.15.

Figure 5.15 – Reported levels of teaching by Alumni

Source: Longitudinal Baseline and Alumni Surveys (2017-2020)

Teaching at the postgraduate level was the area that saw the greatest change from the pre-Scholarship Baseline to first post-Scholarship datapoint, rising from just over one-quarter (28%) to two-fifths (41%) over this timeframe. The reported rate of teaching postgraduate students continued to rise to a peak of nearly three-fifths (58%) at the 6-year mark. The rate of respondents

involved in doctoral supervision also followed a somewhat varied trajectory, staying effectively the same from Baseline to the 2-year point before nearly tripling at the 4-year mark (16%).

As can be seen in Figure 5.16, at least nine-tenths of Alumni were using skills and knowledge from their Scholarship in their teaching activities 'All the time' or 'Often' across all points post-Scholarship. These rates are fairly consistent over time with little in the way of change between data points.

Figure 5.16 – Frequency of use of skills and knowledge from Scholarship in teaching activities
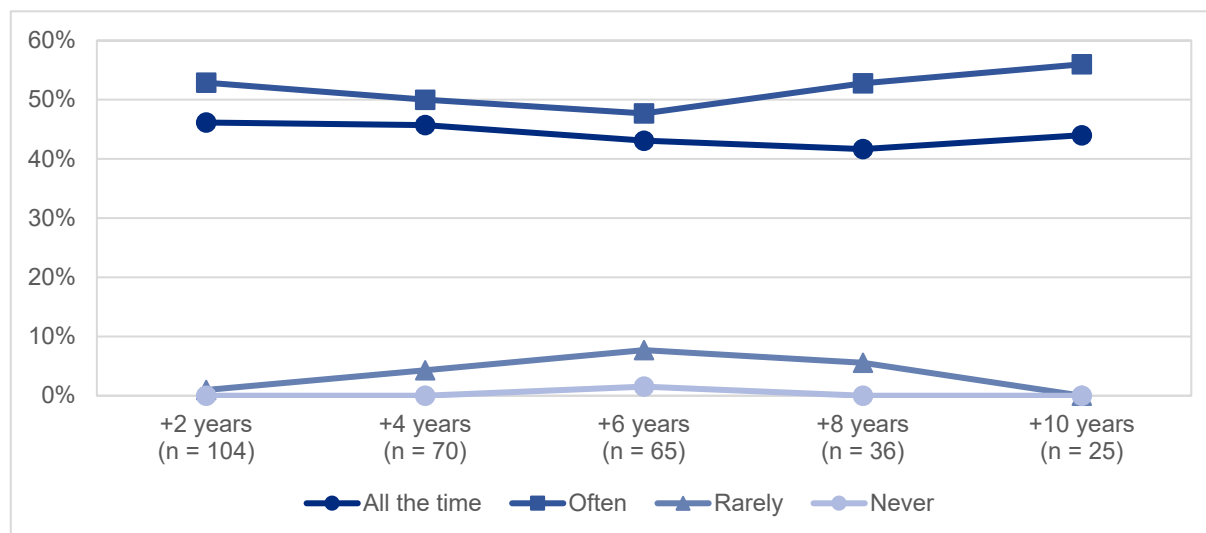
Source: Longitudinal Alumni Surveys (2017-2020)

This provides strong evidence that Commonwealth Distance Learning Alumni are applying what they learned from their Scholarship in pedagogical settings, and that this utility does not diminish over time.

Research

While the proportion of respondents involved in academic research remains stable across all post-Scholarship survey intervals at approximately one-half, there are significant changes in the scope of respondents' involvement in research over time. For example, there is a significant increase in the proportion of these Alumni who are publishing academic journal articles post-Scholarship, as illustrated in Figure 5.17 below.

Figure 5.17 – Frequency of publication of academic journal articles within the past two years
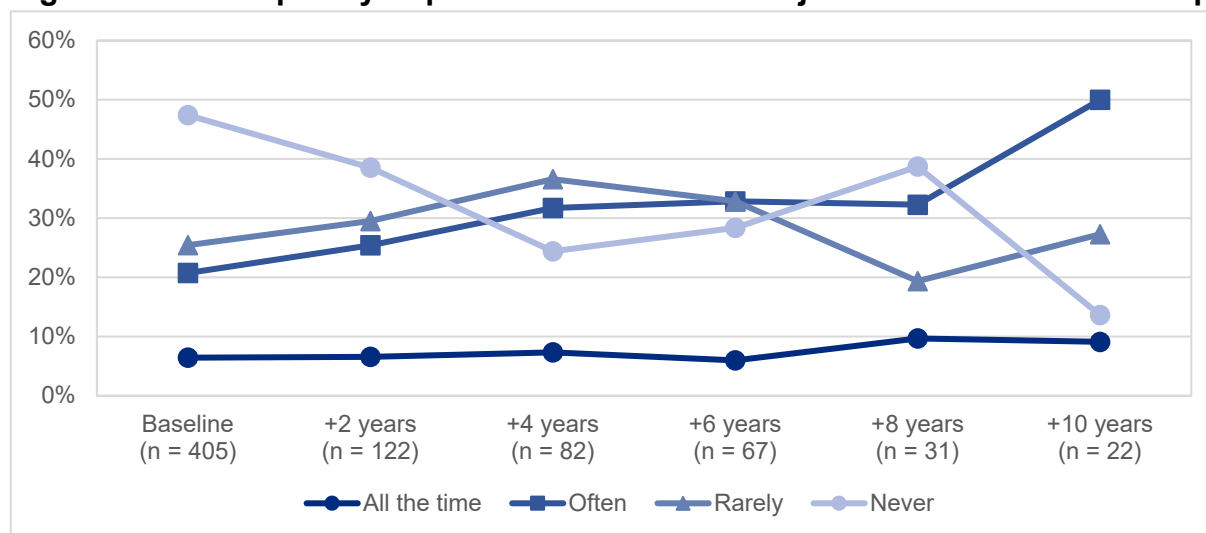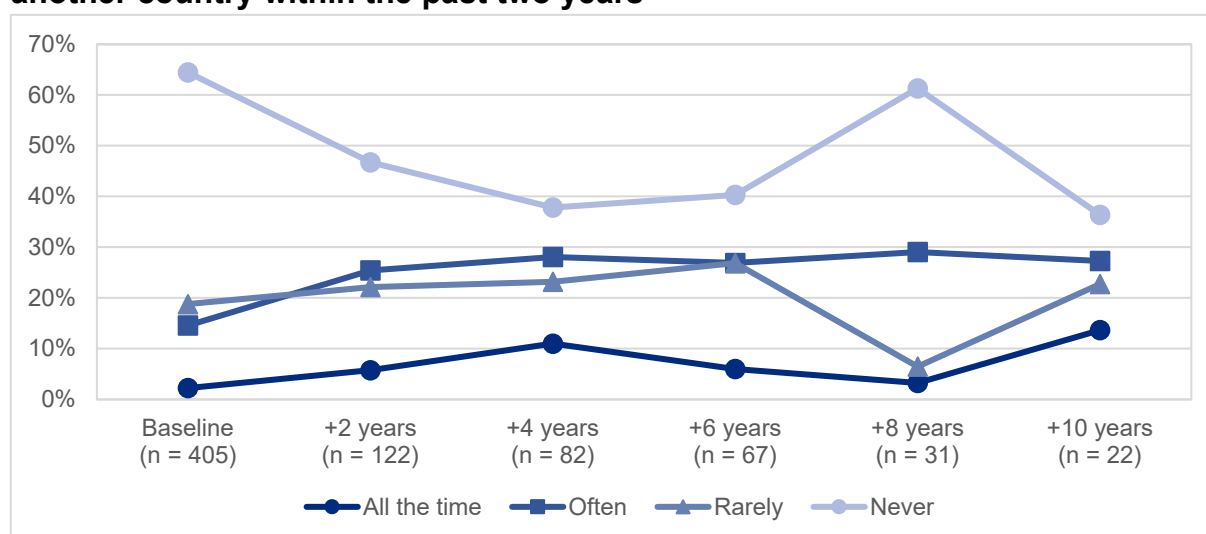

Source: Longitudinal Baseline and Alumni Surveys (2017-2020)

There is a clear drop in the proportion of respondents who indicated that they were 'Never' involved in this activity from the Baseline (47%) to the 2-year mark (39%), a trend which further continues at the 4-year mark (24%). Due to the fact that the proportion of respondents who said they published in academic journals 'All the time' remains consistent across all data points, it is in the proportion of respondents who select 'Often' or 'Rarely' where there are parallel increases over the first three data points.

Alumni also reported an increased frequency of international collaboration in their academic research work. For example, as can be seen in Figure 5.18 below, respondents indicated that they were more likely to co-author an academic paper or report with someone from another country after their Commonwealth Distance Learning Scholarship. The significant drop in the proportion of respondents reported 'Never' doing so in the post-Scholarship period strongly indicates increased activity in this area.

Figure 5.18 – Frequency of co-authoring an academic paper or report with someone from another country within the past two years
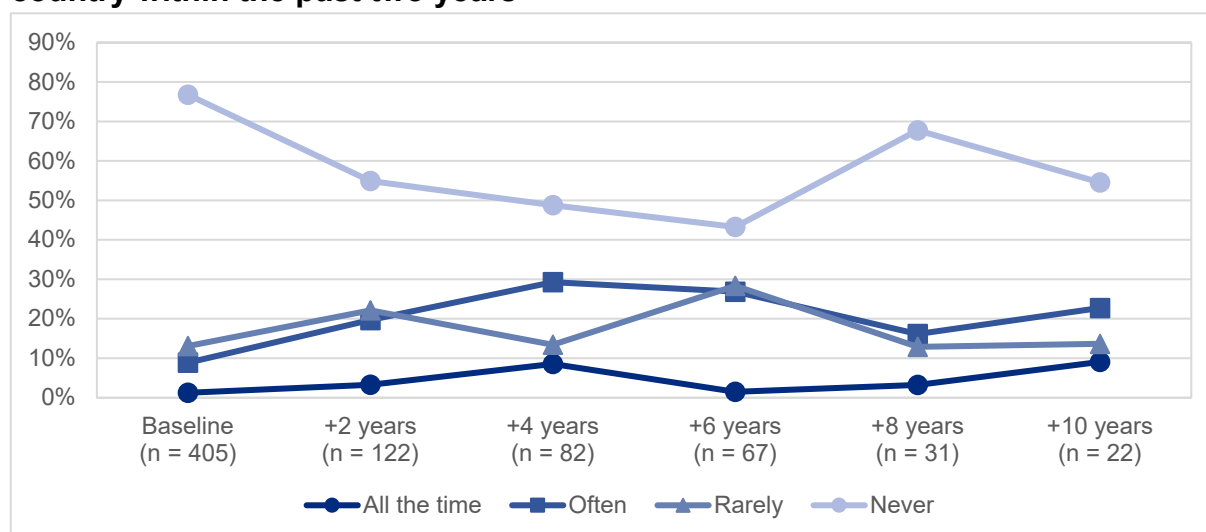

Source: Longitudinal Baseline and Alumni Surveys (2017-2020)

The proportion of respondents who responded 'Never' to this question drops from two-thirds (64%) at the Baseline to less than half (47%) at the 2-year mark, and further drops to just under two-fifths

(38%) at the 4-year mark. Conversely, the proportion who responded that they 'Often' co-author papers increased from one-sixth (15%) at the Baseline to one-quarter (25%) at the 2-year mark.

The same pattern can be seen with Alumni co-authoring grant applications with an international collaborator. As can be seen in Figure 5.19 below, there is a significant decrease in the proportion of respondents who selected 'Never' between the Baseline (77%) and the 2-year mark (55%), a trend which continues at a lesser rate over the next two data collection points.

Figure 5.19 – Frequency of co-authoring a grant application with someone from another country within the past two years

Source: Longitudinal Baseline and Alumni Surveys (2017-2020)

Conversely, the proportion of respondents who indicated that they co-authored grant applications with an international collaborator 'Often' doubled from one-tenth (9%) at the Baseline to one-fifth (20%) at the 2-year mark and remains well above the pre-Scholarship Baseline level across all post-Scholarship data points.

A similar pattern can be seen in the period immediately post-Scholarship with respect to attending research conferences outside of the respondents' home country, illustrated in Figure 5.20 below. Once again there is a clear drop in respondents who reported that they 'Never' attended international research conferences from two-thirds at the Baseline (67%) to less than half (48%) at the 2-year mark.

Figure 5.20 – Frequency of attending a research conference in another country within the past two years
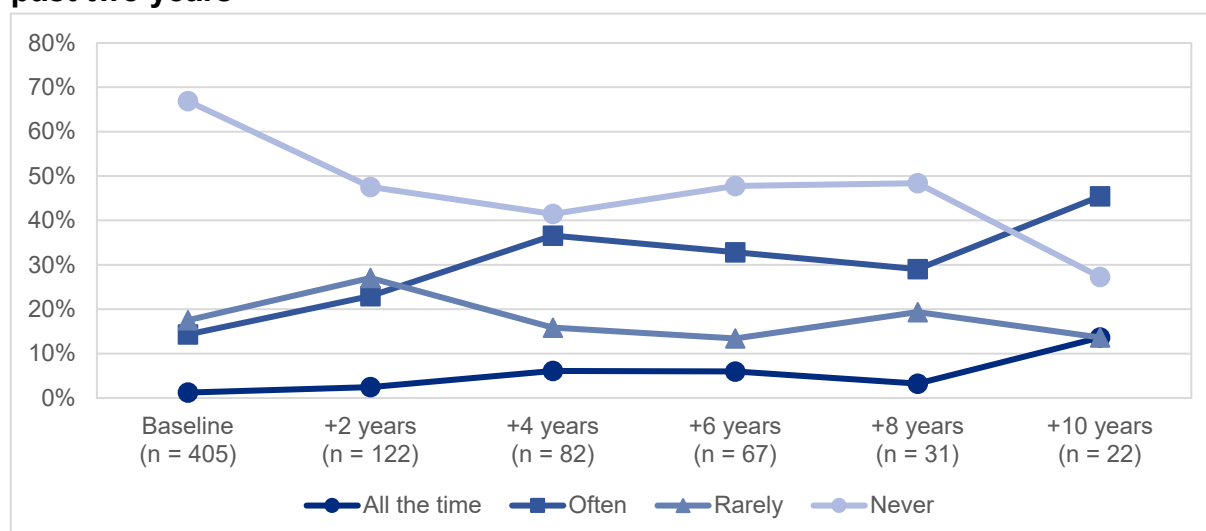
Source: Longitudinal Baseline and Alumni Surveys (2017-2020)

Taken together, these three graphs show a clear increase in the internationalisation of Alumni's academic work in the post-Scholarship period. This is a particularly significant finding given the mode of study and suggests that distance learning can successfully enable future international collaborations.

Finally, for Alumni involved in academic research, the vast majority indicated that their research was related to work that they did during their Commonwealth Scholarship. Most respondents indicated that this was the case 'All the time' or 'Often', as illustrated in Figure 5.21.

Figure 5.21 – Frequency of academic work being directly related to Commonwealth Scholarship within the past two years
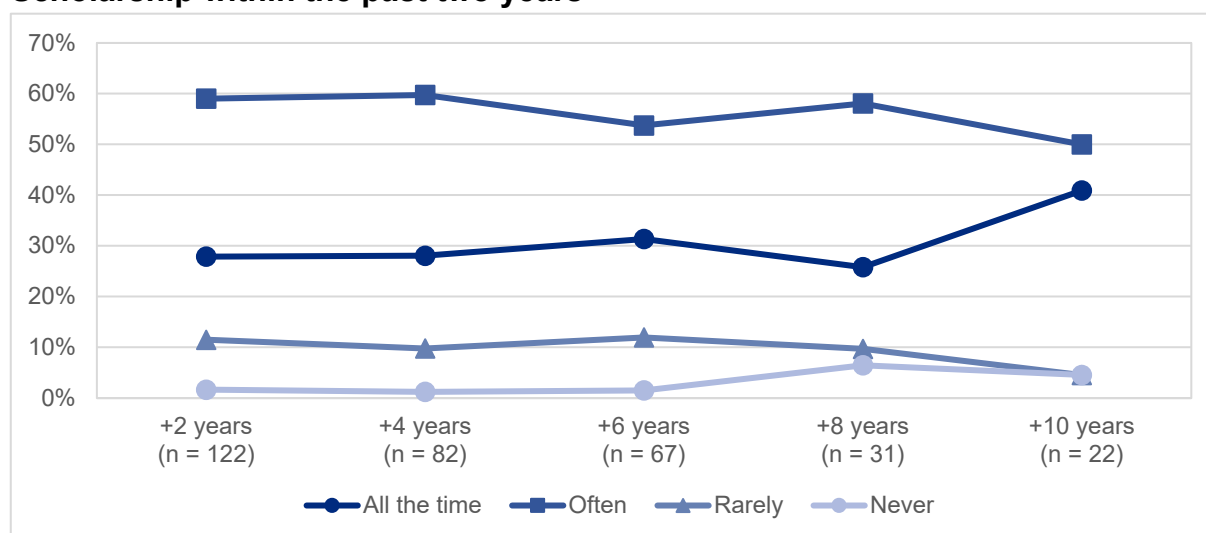
Source: Longitudinal Alumni Surveys (2017-2020)

In fact, more than four-fifths of respondents indicated that this was the case across all data points. As was the case with teaching activities (Figure 5.16), this indicates a strong and continued utility and relevance of Alumni's Commonwealth Scholarship as applied to their future academic research activities.

Innovation

Commonwealth Distance Learning Alumni were asked about their involvement in innovative activities, including leading on new initiatives or projects, leading on bids for funding or investment, and founding of new companies, departments, or institutes.
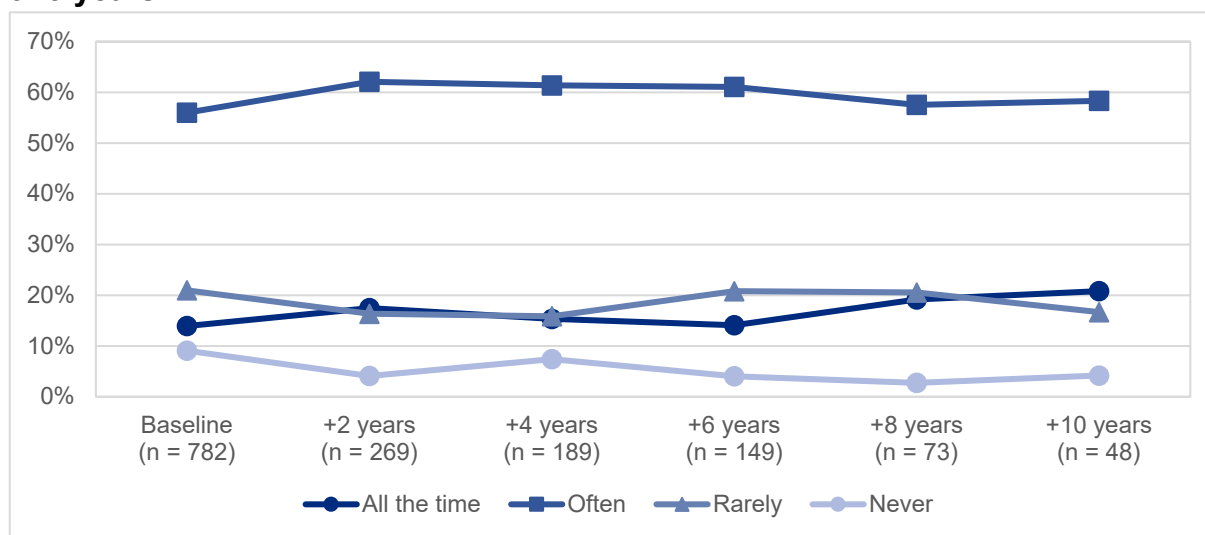
The majority of Alumni reported that they were personally involved in leading or designing a new initiative or project across all data points, as illustrated in Figure 5.22.

Figure 5.22 – Frequency of leading or designing a new initiative or project within the past two years

Source: Longitudinal Baseline and Alumni Surveys (2017-2020)

Alumni were most likely to indicate that they were 'Often' involved in these activities, with approximately three-fifths reporting so, and just under one-fifth reporting that they did so 'All the time' across all data collection points. However, it is important to note that there was little in the way of change between the pre-Scholarship baseline figure and the post-Scholarship follow-up surveys, suggesting that Scholars were already routinely engaged in these activities prior to their Scholarship.

An area that did see a significant increase in activity post-Scholarship is the frequency in which respondents reported being the lead author or negotiator on a bid for funding. As illustrated in Figure 5.23, there was both a notable increase in the proportion of respondents who said they were responsible for this 'All the time' or 'Often', as well as a decrease in the proportion who said they 'Never' did so between the pre-Scholarship baseline and 2-year mark.

Figure 5.23 – Frequency of having lead author or negotiator on a bid for funding or investment within the past two years
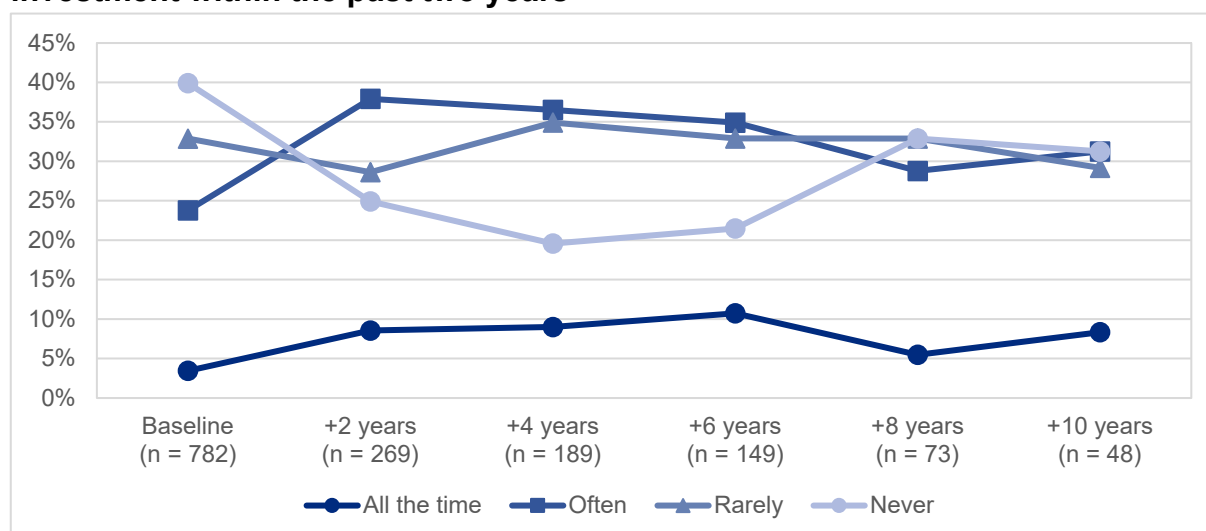
Source: Longitudinal Baseline and Alumni Surveys (2017-2020)

Finally, the proportion of Alumni who reported founding or co-founding a new company, department, or institute within the previous two years was consistent across all post-Scholarship datapoints (see Figure 5.24).

Figure 5.24 – Founding or co-founding a new company, department or institute within the past two years
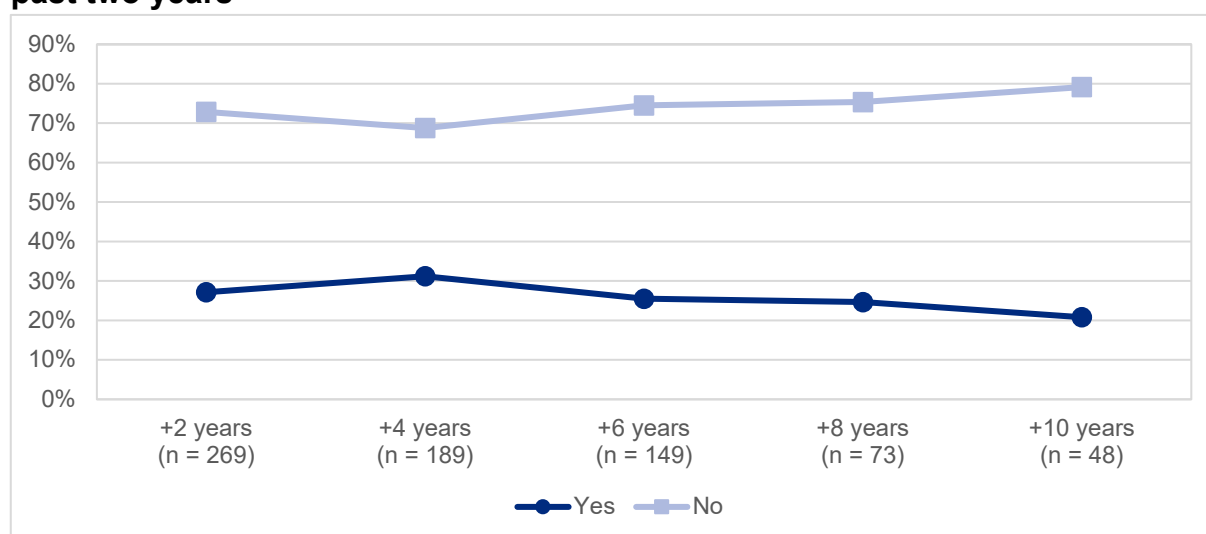
Source: Longitudinal Alumni Surveys (2017-2020)

On average, one-quarter of respondents indicated that they had been involved in this activity, across the ten years post-Scholarship.

Interpersonal Networks

Commonwealth Distance Learning Scholars are unique among Commonwealth Scholars and Fellows in that they spend limited time (or no time at all) in the United Kingdom during their Scholarship. However, the development and maintenance of personal and professional networks by these Scholars is still an area of interest.

Alumni did report an increased frequency of contact with academics at their UK-based university post-Scholarship, although this increase was somewhat fleeting. While there is clear movement

from the pre-Scholarship Baseline to the 2-year mark of the Alumni survey, as illustrated in Figure 5.25, it largely appears to be a reduction of the proportion of respondents who said they 'Never' had these interactions (from 28% down to 16%), and a corresponding rise in those who interacted with these contacts 'Rarely' (which went from 23% to 42%).

Figure 5.25 – Frequency of interaction with academic contacts at UK-based university within the past two years
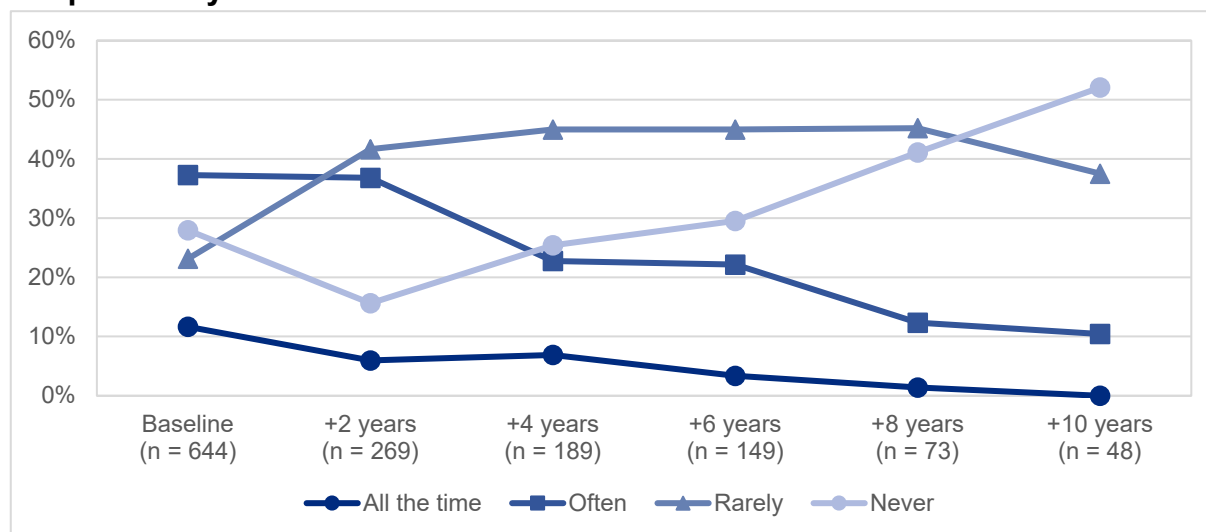
Source: Longitudinal Baseline and Alumni Surveys (2017-2020)

This is a positive change, representing the creation of networks that were not previously there, however, they are not durable in nature. The decay of these relationships is represented in the data points after the 2-year mark, where there are progressively fewer respondents who say they interact with these contacts 'All the time' or 'Often' while the proportion who 'Never' have these interactions continually increases until it is the most frequently selected response at the 10-year mark.

When it comes to professional contacts in the United Kingdom, it appears that there is little in the way of substantial contacts built by the Scholarship experience as can be seen in Figure 5.26.

Figure 5.26 – Frequency of interaction with professional contacts in the UK within the past two years
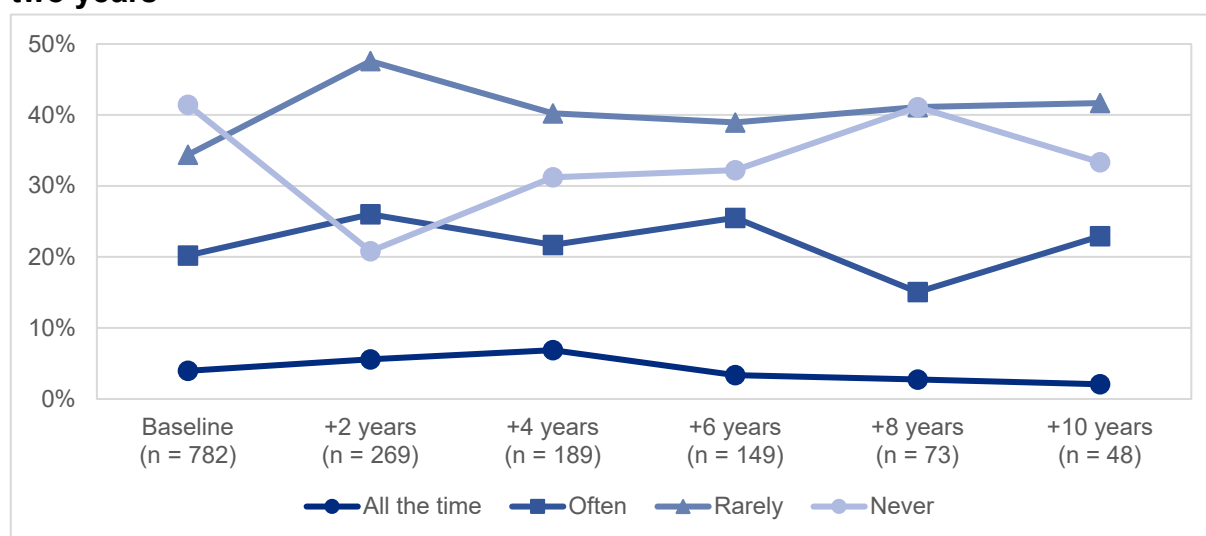
Source: Longitudinal Baseline and Alumni Surveys (2017-2020)

While there is a drop in the proportion of respondents who indicate that they 'Never' interact with these contacts at the Baseline compared to the 2-year data point (41% down to 21%), there is little in the way of change in the proportion of respondents who select 'All the time' or 'Often'. In fact, the proportion of respondents who select these two options is relatively consistent from the Baseline, suggesting that these responses largely represent pre-existing relationships.

Respondents' interactions with professional contacts in their home country also remain very stable over time, as illustrated in Figure 5.27.

Figure 5.27 – Frequency of interaction with professional contacts in home country within the past two years
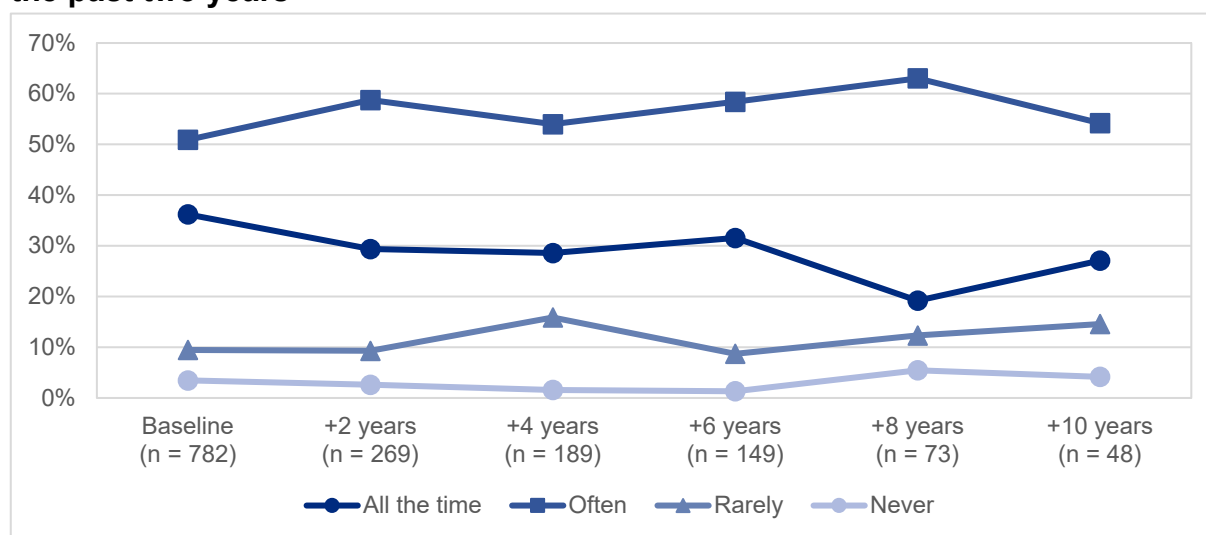
Source: Longitudinal Baseline and Alumni Surveys (2017-2020)

The steadiness in the rates of contact across all data points indicates that the Scholarship did not have an effect in this area, and that these were likely pre-existing contacts that respondents continued to interact with.

However, despite the relative stability in respondents' relationships with their professional contacts in the UK and in their home country, one area that did see a notable change is the frequency of interaction respondents had with professional contacts in third countries (other than the UK and their home country), illustrated in Figure 5.28.

Figure 5.28 – Frequency of interaction with professional contacts in another country (other than the UK or home country) within the past two years
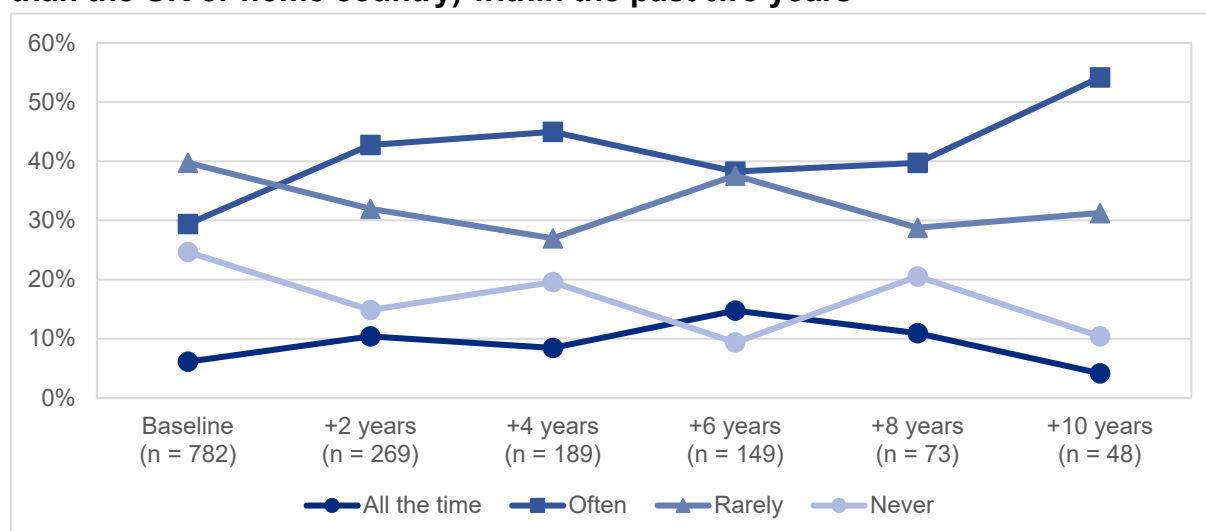
Source: Longitudinal Baseline and Alumni Surveys (2017-2020)

There was a significant increase in the proportion of Alumni who reported that they 'Often' interacted with these international contacts at the 2-year mark compared to the pre-Scholarship Baseline (from 29% up to 43%). There were also clear drops in the proportion who said that they had these interactions 'Rarely' or 'Never' over the same period, and while the proportions of respondents who selected each of these two responses fluctuated over subsequent data points, they were consistently below the pre-Scholarship Baseline level. Conversely, from the 2-year mark onwards respondents were consistently most likely to indicate they 'Often' interacted with these contacts, peaking at over half (54%) at the 10-year mark. This indicates that not only are these relationships durable, but that respondents' Scholarship experience may have helped to expand and strengthen relationships with their international professional contacts.

Finally, since 2020 respondents have been asked to indicate how frequently they interacted with other Commonwealth Scholars or Alumni, illustrated in Figure 5.29. While taking care to note low number of respondents for the final two data points, there is a clear drop in the proportion of respondents who selected 'Never' from the pre-Scholarship Baseline (32%) to the 2-year mark (10%), indicating the creation of new contacts with others in the CSC community.

Figure 5.29 – Frequency of interaction with Commonwealth Scholars or Alumni within the past two years
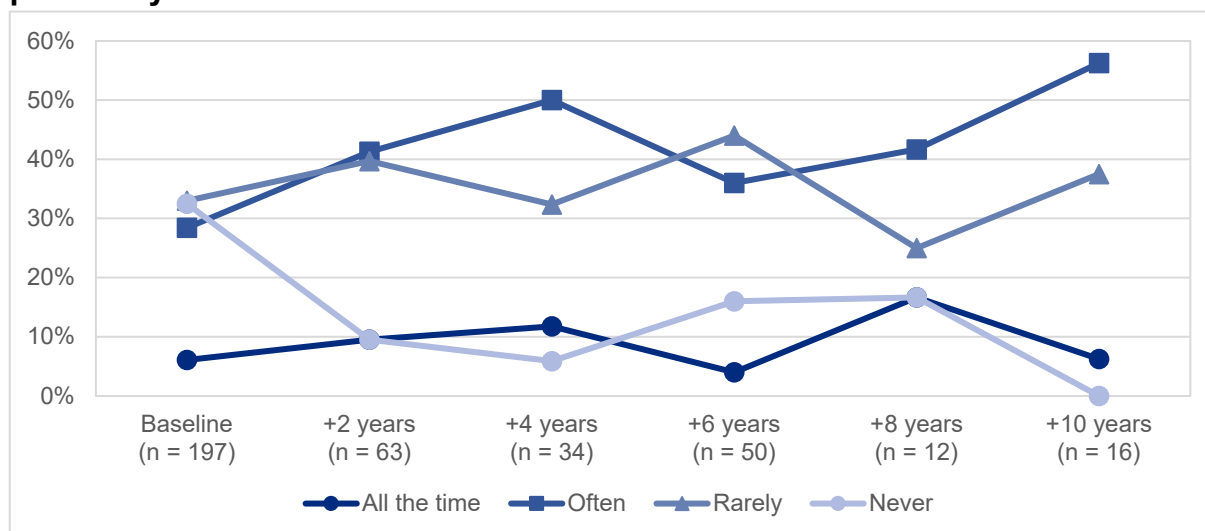
Source: Longitudinal Baseline and Alumni Surveys (2020)

The proportion of respondents who selected 'Never' remains far below the pre-Scholarship Baseline for all remaining data points. Conversely, the proportion of respondents who indicated that they 'Often' interacted with other Commonwealth Scholars or Alumni increases from one-quarter (28%) at the Baseline to two-fifths (41%) in the first post-Scholarship survey and remains well above the pre-Scholarship Baseline level across all remaining data points.

Summary

On average, three-fifths of Commonwealth Distance Learning Scholars complete the full Master's degree with an additional one-sixth exiting the programme with a lower (certificate or diploma) qualification, bringing the total proportion of Scholars exiting with a qualification to three-quarters. The reasons Scholars give for exiting the programme prior to qualifying for their Master's are largely similar to the reasons given for exiting the programme without achieving any qualification. These include personal circumstances, such as health, finance, or family responsibilities, or professional circumstances, such as increased work obligations.

Commonwealth Distance Learning Alumni reported significant gains to their knowledge and skills due to their Scholarship. Nearly nine-tenths of respondents reported either 'Substantial' or 'Moderate' changes in all areas, with a clear majority indicating that they had realised 'Substantial change' across all areas. These gains in knowledge and skills are further evidenced by the doubling of the proportion of respondents who felt that their skill level was higher than that required in their current employment from the pre-Scholarship Baseline, up to three-quarters of respondents two years post-Scholarship.

Alumni consistently report high rates of residence in their home country or region in the years following their Scholarship. At minimum, four-fifths of respondents reported living in their home country for the first ten years after their Scholarship, with an even greater proportion reporting residence within their home region over the same period. Employment (either temporary or permanent) was the most frequent reason given by respondents as to why they were living abroad, with most of these Alumni reporting that they intended to return to their home country within four years.

Most Alumni reported that they were either employed or employed and studying across all data points, with a clear trend of respondents moving from being only employed towards being both employed and studying during the first six years of their career post-Scholarship. This is borne out by how many Alumni reported gaining additional qualifications after their Scholarship, particularly around the 4-year and 6-year points of their post-Scholarship career.

There are also clear trends in Alumni's sectors of employment. The Public and NGO sectors are the most represented across all survey intervals and there is significant movement away from the Private sector and towards the NGO sector from the Baseline to the 2-year mark. Later, while the Public and NGO sectors remain the top two sectors of employment, there is clear movement away from both of these sectors towards both the Academic and Multilateral sectors, and to a lesser extent back towards the Private sector.

Virtually all Alumni reported that they consistently and frequently make use of the knowledge and skills that they learned from their Scholarship either 'All the time' or 'Often' across all data points, both inside and outside of the workplace. Similarly, almost all Alumni reported that they approached problems in different ways because of something they learned from their Scholarship 'All the time' or 'Often' across all post-Scholarship data points. Commonwealth Distance Learning Alumni also consistently reported that they taught colleagues things they learned from their Scholarship through formal and informal channels across all post-Scholarship data points, and both made and advocated for changes within their organisation based on their Scholarship experience. Furthermore, almost all Alumni reported frequent application of the knowledge and skills gained through their Scholarship 'All the time' or 'Often' in specific workplace responsibilities, including teaching and academic research.

While only approximately half of Alumni reported being involved in academic research both before and after their Scholarship, those who did conduct academic research reported an increase in their activities and outputs. Alumni were more likely to report that they published academic journal articles in the years following their Scholarship, as well as greater involvement in international collaborations in co-authoring academic papers or research grants and attending international research conferences.

The changes observed in Distance Learning Alumni's interpersonal networks were quite varied, as was the durability of those changes over time. While Alumni reported greater contact with academics at their university and professional contacts in the United Kingdom immediately after the completion of their Scholarship, the frequency of interaction with these contacts slowly fell over time indicating that these relationships were not durable. However, when it comes to professional contacts in third countries and other Commonwealth Scholars and Alumni, not only is there an increased frequency of contact with these groups from the Baseline to the post-Scholarship period, but these relationships also appear to be far more durable over time.

The next section explores how Commonwealth Distance Learning Alumni convert the personal and professional outcomes discussed in this section into long-term development impact.

Expanding Horizons:
Commonwealth Distance Learning Scholarships

| Partnerships To Promote a Low-Carbon World

Since 2018, the Commonwealth Scholarship Commission has funded a total of 15 Scholars to undertake a Master's Degree in Carbon Management at the University of Edinburgh as distance learners.

Designed for graduates interested in advancing climate change management across business, industry, NGOs, and government, this interdisciplinary course aims to provide a broad and deeper understanding of climate science and economics, and an integrated understanding of carbon management. The course is specifically designed to suit professionals who want to enhance their knowledge and apply newly acquired skills while they work.

The CSC Evaluation Team conducted in-depth interviews with Dr James Paterson, Programme Director at the University of Edinburgh for the online Master's Degree in Carbon Management and Moses Phiri, a 2018 Commonwealth Distance Learning Scholar, with the aim of understanding their distinct perspectives and experiences with the programme.

Moses Phiri, a 2018 Commonwealth Distance Learning Scholar.

| Motivations and Expectations for Participating in the Commonwealth Distance Learning Programme

For Moses, a science teacher from Zambia, enrolling in this programme offered an opportunity to improve his work-related knowledge and skills and to advance his career, 'What really motivated me to study the programme was to sharpen my way of thinking and enable me to have a broader perspective and in-depth understanding of climate-related issues. This would be a stepping stone for me to achieve a lot. I also realised that as a science teacher it is very important for me to be effective in delivering information to others. And at the same time, I was motivated to do the programme because I was looking at my career advancement. For example, I intend to start teaching at the local university.'

Meanwhile, speaking from the perspective of the University of Edinburgh, Dr Paterson shared the university's motivations for offering a Master's Degree in Carbon Management as a distance learning course. These included an impetus to create and widen learning opportunities for students from diverse personal and professional backgrounds, and to create networks and share knowledge and experiences through a flexible learning experience.

University of Edinburgh.

> Widening opportunities by taking this MSc course to students from many countries that wouldn't otherwise be able to do it is something that we believe in strongly. We get students with different professional backgrounds, experiences, countries, and age groups and this diversity enriches the programme. Having a diverse student body is our biggest selling card. It's an online experience, the students work from home, and we have a good online student community who get to meet (virtually) during the tutorials and in doing coursework. The programme is designed to fit around work and personal life.

The Role of the University of Edinburgh in Delivering the Distance Learning Programme

The Master's course is delivered by talented lecturers, with substantial expertise that can meet the demands and expectations of students from diverse professional backgrounds. It is also designed to offer a platform for interaction and networking of Scholars and staff, which promotes knowledge exchange as explained by Dr Paterson, 'We have a lot of expertise in the GeoSciences Department, so the Scholars get lectures from people who are quite senior professors and experts in climate change science. When they do their final year dissertation project, they can be supervised by these experts, or professors in other departments. And we do insist on the tutorial system where we can talk to and meet the students in a live situation, and that's one of our strengths as we do get to know the students, and they meet each other virtually, which is an important part of the programme, unquestionably.'

Additional support is provided to Scholars through one-on-one tutoring, which include discussions on progress and challenges faced by Scholars. To maximise flexibility, lectures are also recorded and made available to Scholars who are unable to attend. Dr Paterson added that lecturers also offer practical guidance to Scholars regarding which courses to take and how much time to spend on studies, 'I meet my students through tutorials twice a week online as the programme director, and we also have personal tutoring which has a pastoral element of looking after the student.' This support offered by the university lecturers extends beyond completion of the course, as confirmed by Moses who had just completed his studies, 'There is interaction with the university, I still communicate with my former personal tutor. And I have been able to ask him to write a job recommendation letter for me, which he has been able to do without hesitation.' This was echoed by Dr Paterson who added that, 'I still have a relationship with the alumni who are five years out of the programme and they come and give talks.'

Asked about the existence of partnerships in delivering the distance learning programme, Dr Paterson highlighted that by virtue of offering funding to some of the Scholars undertaking the Master's Degree in Carbon Management, the CSC is considered by the University of Edinburgh as a key partner. However, the university additionally collaborates with various organisations in the United Kingdom, Germany, Australia, and the United States to deliver the programme. These informal partners provide expert talks, demonstrations, tours for Scholars, and topics for student dissertations and projects. In some cases, employers of the students, or students with expertise in a specific area, deliver talks during course tutorials, 'Quite often we have one-off talks from the employers of the Scholars, and that relationship exists because of that connection with the student. The students themselves do provide quite a few of those talks, particularly if they're an expert in the field.'

Leading Environmental Projects in the Workplace and Community

As a proud beneficiary of a Commonwealth Scholarship, Moses shared his experience in the distance learning programme and how he has been using the extensive skills and knowledge gained through his studies to effectively deliver his work tasks and activities, 'The DL programme enabled me to acquire analytical skills which I use in my day-to-day routine to make better decisions that integrate sustainable development goals such as reducing the carbon footprint. My employer has benefited from my training which has had a trickle-down effect. I have facilitated workshops to train other teachers on environmental issues and I have been involved in policy development for schools based on what I learnt.'

Drawing from the knowledge and skills gained through his Master's studies, Moses successfully implemented a biodigester project, that uses clean energy and recycles food waste, at Chadiza Boarding Secondary School where he worked as Deputy Headteacher while pursuing his studies.

Biodigester construction at Chadiza Boarding Secondary School.

> The school that I influenced to develop a commercial biodigester is now used as a model for schools and communities on how they can use clean energy to save forests.

Undertaking the Master's course and applying the skills gained to implement projects at his workplace has also had a positive impact on Moses' career progression. 'As a result of the skills which I acquired from the programme, my supervisors were convinced that if they gave me more responsibilities I would be up to the task. My promotion [to a Headteacher] came after implementing some of the projects at the school while I was studying, such as the biodigester.'

As a Headteacher at Lundazi Boarding Secondary School, Moses initiated a piggery project. Starting with just 6 pigs in January 2021, by June 2022 the pig farming project had expanded to 88 pigs.

Pigs being fed on waste vegetables from the Lundazi school garden.

More recent projects include the installation of solar lights at Lundazi school and promoting local production of vegetables to feed pupils, using clean energy. These activities reduce the school's carbon footprint, benefitting the local environment and improving people's livelihoods.

Organically grown cabbage to feed pupils at Lundazi Boarding Secondary School.

> Through recycling of food waste from the boarding section of the school as food for pigs and through aquacultural projects that I introduced to grow tilapia fish locally to feed pupils and to sell to the local community, it means the community can have fresh fish and pork produced with very little carbon footprint.

Solar lighting at the fishpond and greenhouse at Lundazi school.

Moses has also taken up a part-time lecturing role at a local university, the University of Zambia where he teaches undergraduate and postgraduate students. He often draws from the skills honed during the Scholarship in his teaching, and he has been instrumental in developing the course curriculum, 'I was offered a part time lecturing job at The University of Zambia because of my studies which were sponsored by the CSC. Another local university has also benefited in that I developed their undergraduate programme in climate change based on what I learnt on the Master's programme.'

One of the three fishponds at Lundazi Boarding Secondary School.

The support Moses has received from his employer has been crucial, enabling him to pursue his studies smoothly, while simultaneously applying the developmental activities that were inspired by course learnings at his workplace, 'My employer has been supportive during my studies. When I was doing my dissertation, I had to concentrate on my research and do my work tasks at the same time. I was granted some time off work.'

Benefits of the distance learning programme to the Scholars, their employers and wider communities were reinforced by Dr Paterson, who highlighted the importance of identifying skills gaps, and dissemination of knowledge, 'The benefit has been that the Scholars are getting what I hope is an up-to-date and world-class education in climate change topics. They're talking to different experts running different courses, everything from learning about energy systems, renewable energy, to climate change impacts, to climate change adaptation and mitigation. We're increasingly seeing students who are already working in the sector and are sent by their employer to study because it's useful for their jobs, and their employers see their skills gap and want them to have the skills and the knowledge on climate change issues. We give the students a good grounding and understanding of science, how to interpret the science, and how to educate somebody in their company and in their community. It's about being able to understand and disseminate knowledge to a non-expert audience.'

The Value of Knowledge Exchange and Sharing Lived Experiences

Participating in delivering the distance learning course has contributed to the University of Edinburgh's goals of widening inclusivity and broadening opportunities to recruit students from diverse contexts, and professional backgrounds. This in turn has stimulated fruitful knowledge exchange between students, and between staff and students, who can share their diverse lived experiences of the impacts of climate change and adaptation through tutorials, 'The university has goals and ambitions to widen inclusivity and to broaden the opportunities for students from different backgrounds. Having students from different countries, and certainly the Commonwealth countries who are living and experiencing the impacts of climate change, whether that's drought, floods, or heatwaves bring those experiences and stimulate discussions on how they are trying to overcome them.'

Dr Paterson attributed the successful delivery of the distance learning course to date to having access to CSC funding, which has boosted student recruitment for the course, as well as the support offered by international partners and the employers of the students, all adding unique value to the course, 'It's great to be able to have this partnership with the Commonwealth Scholarship Commission because it brings in students from countries we wouldn't otherwise be able to reach. The beauty of doing an online programme is I can have somebody from anywhere in the world, join us for a tutorial and do a 30-minute presentation. We had a woman who set up a community wind turbine project in the Isle of Lewis in the Hebrides, and the students have learnt all about renewable energy, wind turbines, and all the issues and the potential benefits of that. Setting a community turbine project up is an element that we don't really touch on. Sometimes we get professionals in because of a student contact. I've had, for example, one student brought in his former manager to talk about setting up energy systems in refugee camps.'

Looking Ahead: The Expected Long-Term Impact of the Distance Learning Programme

Some of the long-term impacts of the course identified by Dr Paterson include ongoing knowledge transfer from Scholars to pupils, colleagues, or their local communities as the course equips them with the knowledge to tackle societal problems and improve livelihoods, 'Most of the Scholars are working professionals who are quite skilled in one aspect or another, and they go on to do something useful, climate change related back home. We've had schoolteachers who wanted to learn more about climate change, so they can teach their students. There's an encouraging number of students who are now applying acquired skills in the real world such as working in a local community to improve water sanitation or creating awareness on understanding of adaptation to climate change or introducing renewable energy systems.'

He added that the programme offers a platform to network and establish collaborations that continue after the Scholarship, 'We are providing students with good knowledge, and they continue to network afterwards. The testimony to that is we have a very strong LinkedIn group of alumni, of students from the course. It's currently over 400 students, so we do get to see what they're doing.'

Overall, delivering the course contributes towards the University of Edinburgh achieving the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals. By equipping talented professionals from around the Commonwealth with the knowledge and skills needed to have immediate and long-term environmental impact in their communities, this programme is ultimately making the world a better place for people to live.

> The University has 2030 goals, and they talk about sustainability and improving the world to make it a better place for people to live in. We're certainly I think doing that, as in the long-term we are slowly increasing the number of students who have a good understanding of climate change issues and are working to make their societies, their communities, and their countries a better place.

Section 6 – Impact

The personal and professional changes that Alumni realise post-Scholarship are important effects of their Distance Learning experience, however the ways in which Alumni apply their learnings to improve the lives of others is the ultimate end-result sought by the Commonwealth Distance Learning programme. This section explores the different areas in which Distance Learners apply their Scholarship learnings to realise meaningful development impact.

Overall

Scholars and Alumni were asked to indicate their ability to bring about change at the Institutional, Local, National, and International levels, with almost all (96% or more) longitudinal survey respondents reporting that they have created impact in at least one of these areas across all data points. Figure 6.1 below illustrates the responses by level.

Figure 6.1 – Capacity to influence change due to Commonwealth Scholarship[21]
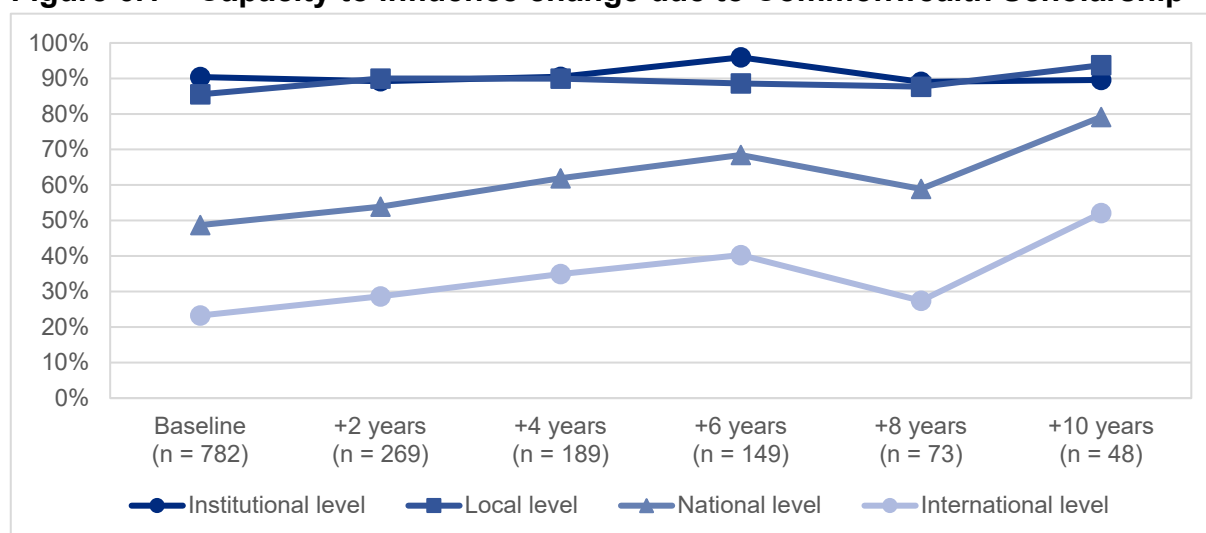
Source: Longitudinal Baseline and Alumni Surveys (2017-2020)

It is clear that prior to receiving a Commonwealth Scholarship, respondents were already significantly involved in affecting change at both the Institutional (90%) and Local (86%) levels. Given that individuals who receive Commonwealth Distance Learning Scholarships are partially selected on the basis of their prior development impact activities this is not surprising. A high proportion of Alumni continue to report affecting change at these levels across the ten years post-Scholarship, with a minimum of nine-tenths of respondents indicating that they did so across all data points.

While the proportions reporting impact at the Institutional and Local levels remain consistent, those for the National and International levels show near consistent growth over time. Approximately half (49%) of respondents reported that they influenced change at the National level prior to their Scholarship, rising to almost four-fifths (79%) at the 10-year mark post-Scholarship. Similarly, while

---

[21] Note: For the Baseline survey, respondents were asked generally about their ability to influence change at these levels.

only one-quarter (23%) of respondents indicated influence at the International level in the Baseline survey, this rate more than doubles to just over half (52%) by the 10-year mark.

In addition to the level of impact, respondents also report whether their work has had impact in the areas of Social Development, Civic Engagement, Economic Development, and Policymaking. Once again, a large proportion (90% or higher) of respondents indicated that they contributed to at least one of these areas. These responses are illustrated below in Figure 6.2.

Figure 6.2 – Contributions to areas of development
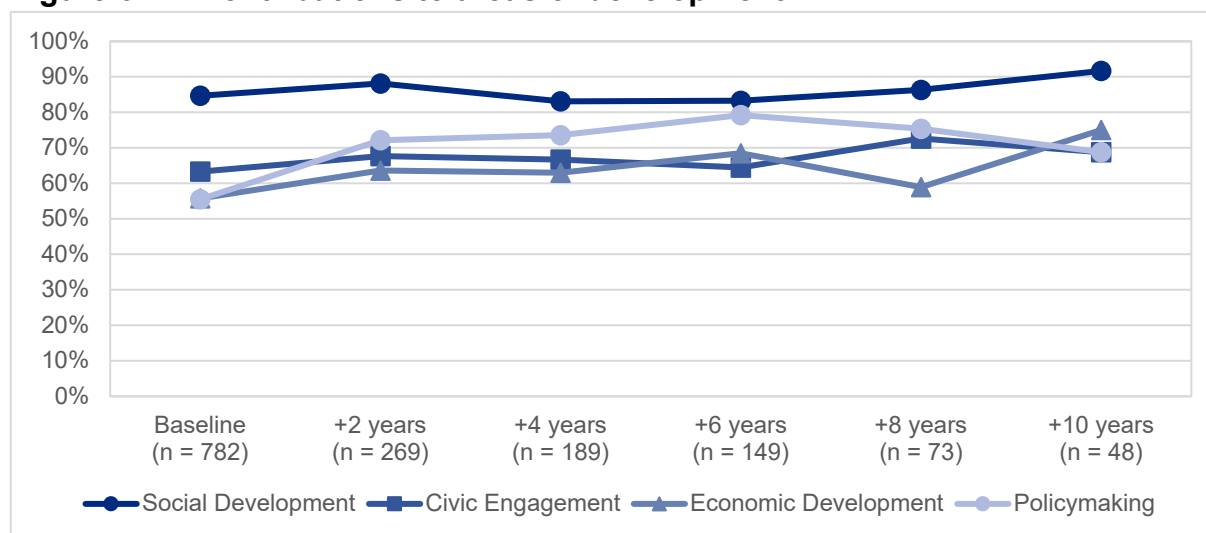
Source: Longitudinal Baseline and Alumni Surveys (2017-2020)

A high proportion of Distance Learning Scholars reported that their work contributed to Social Development prior to their Scholarship, with over four-fifths (85%) reporting impact in this area at the Baseline. Alumni continued to report that they were contributing to Social Development at a similar rate throughout the first ten years post-Scholarship, peaking at over nine-tenths (92%) at the 10-year mark.

Involvement in Civic Engagement was also relatively stable both pre- and post-Scholarship, albeit at a lower rate than Social Development. Prior to their Scholarship, Distance Learning Scholars reported being involved in Civic Engagement activities approximately two-thirds (63%) of the time. Alumni reported that they worked in this area at a similar rate for the first six years post-Scholarship before a slight increase to approximately seven-tenths at the 8- and 10-year marks.

The proportion of respondents reporting involvement in Economic Development shows a general trajectory of growth over time. While just over half (56%) of respondents indicated that their work contributed to Economic Development pre-Scholarship, this rises to two-thirds (63%) at the 2-year mark post-Scholarship and remains at that level or above, with the exception of respondents at the 8-year point who still reported involvement in Economic Development at a rate of three-fifths (59%). However, the proportion reporting involvement in this area bounces back to a peak of three-quarters (75%) at the 10-year mark.

Policymaking was the area that saw the greatest amount of growth from the pre-Scholarship baseline (55%) to the two-year mark (72%). Alumni continue to engage in policymaking at an increasing rate to a peak of four-fifths (79%) at the 6-year mark before tapering down to just over two-thirds (69%) at the 10-year mark, which is still notably higher than the baseline rate.

Sustainable Development Goals

Since 2019, respondents to the Alumni surveys have indicated up to three Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) that they were contributing towards through their work. Nearly all respondents (94%) selected at least one SDG, with most selecting more than one. The distribution of these responses is illustrated in Figure 6.3 below.

Figure 6.3 – Contribution of work towards Sustainable Development Goals
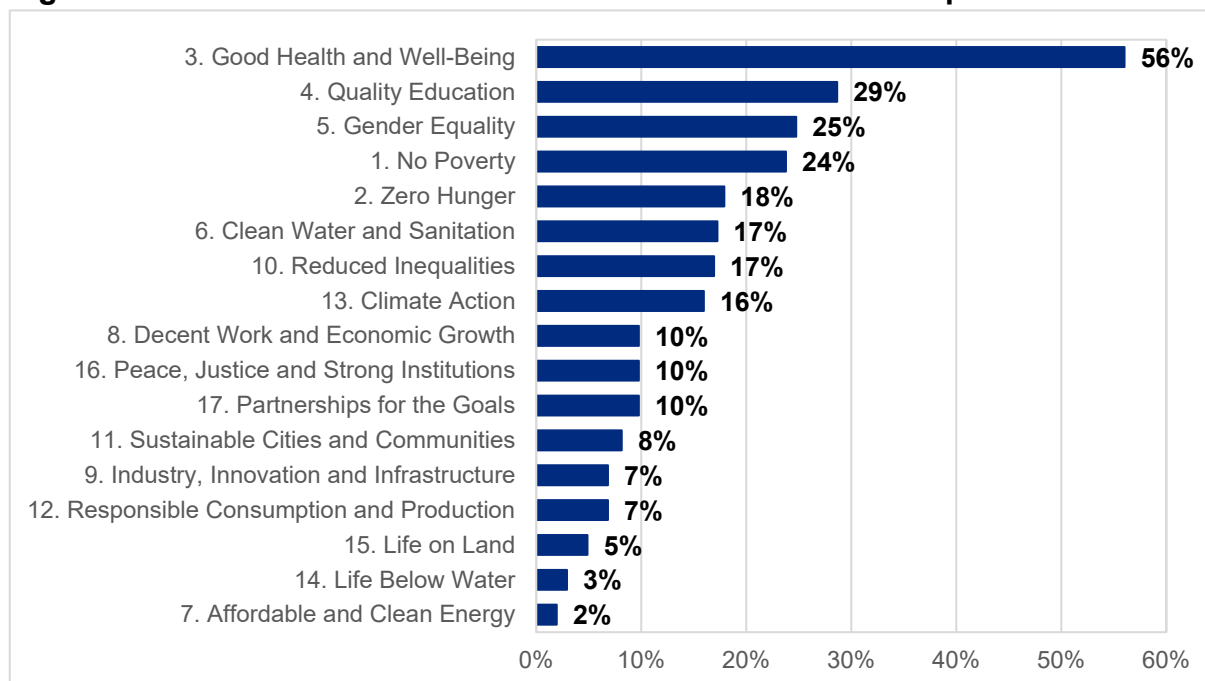
Source: Longitudinal Alumni Surveys (2019-2020)
n = 307

SDG 3, 'Good Health and Well-Being' was the most frequently selected SDG, with more than half (56%) of respondents indicating that their work was contributing towards this Goal. Three more SDGs were selected by approximately one-quarter of respondents, namely SDG 4 'Quality Education' (29%), SDG 5 'Gender Equality' (25%), and SDG 1 'No Poverty' (24%). Four other SDGs were selected by approximately one-sixth of the respondents, namely SDG 2 'No Hunger' (18%), SDG 6 'Clean Water and Sanitation' (17%), SDG 10 'Reduced Inequities' (17%), and SDG 13 'Climate Action' (16%).

Impact Themes

Alumni survey respondents provided free text responses detailing their work and how it contributes towards development and the Sustainable Development Goals. These comments have been coded thematically, and examples of the most frequently mentioned areas are summarised below.

Health

'Health' was the theme most frequently mentioned by Distance Learning Alumni, appearing in nearly two-fifths (39%) of the responses to this question. This theme encompasses any instances where Alumni's impact is within the health sector, including both physical and mental health. The other themes most commonly associated with 'Health' are 'Policy', which also appears in one-third (31%) of the responses coded as 'Health', as well as 'Community' (21%), 'Economic' (13%), 'Education' (12%), 'Women' (10%), and 'Children' (9%).

Examples of the impact that Distance Learning Alumni do under the 'Health' theme include serving as a member of the World Health Organisation (WHO)'s working group on a vaccine for Hepatitis E which created policies for the use of that vaccine (also coded as 'Policy' and 'Multilateral'), providing minimum-cost at-home palliative care to cancer patients within their community (also coded as 'Community' and 'Economic'), and overseeing a sexual and reproductive health programme that also provides entrepreneurship training and small enterprise grants to over 1,000 women (also coded as 'Economic' and 'Women'). Other examples include providing health education through a local radio programme aimed at increasing awareness of how to prevent and manage COVID-19 (also coded as 'Education' and 'Outreach'), providing training to mothers who then support other mothers to improve family diets and income by starting kitchen gardens (also coded as 'Women' and 'Training'), and managing a regional stunting prevention programme which helps to improve children's nutritional status.

Policy

'Policy' was the theme second-most frequently mentioned by Commonwealth Distance Learning Alumni, featuring in almost one-third (31%) of their responses. These comments described instances where Alumni have influenced or shaped policy or law within their organisations or governments. The most frequent theme associated with 'Policy' is 'Health', with two-fifths (40%) of the comments coded as 'Policy' also being coded as 'Health'. The other themes most frequently mentioned in conjunction with 'Policy' are 'Economic' (17%), 'Government' (16%), 'Education' (15%), 'Children' (13%), and 'Community' (13%).

Examples provided by Alumni within this theme include one Distance Learning Alumni working in 'Policy' and 'Health' who examined the institutional protocols and policies around testing for tuberculosis at their National Reference Library to ensure that they aligned with internationally recognised best practice, while another Alumni working in the area of 'Policy' and 'Economic' impact cited their contributions to their country's Fisheries Policy, Strategy and Action Plan which has subsequently guided the investment of government funding into major priority areas within that sector. Another Alumni mentioned their work mapping the distribution of tsetse fly populations and trypanosomiasis (sleeping sickness) which informed the policy formulation around tsetse control for their Ministry of Fisheries and Livestock (also coded as 'Government' and Agriculture'). One Alumni working in the area of 'Policy', 'Education', and 'Children' highlighted their contributions to the development of their Ministry of Education's pre-primary education policy which seeks to expand access to this level of education for all children aged four to five. A final example of work relating to 'Policy' is an Alumni who contributed to the creation of community by-laws aimed at protecting local community forest and wildlife resources (also coded under the 'Community' and 'Environmental' themes).

Economic

The third most-frequently mentioned theme in Commonwealth Distance Learning Alumni's impact statements is 'Economic', which appears in one-fifth (20%) of the responses. In these instances, the impact has been directly related to an economic benefit, with the most frequent related themes being 'Policy' (26%), 'Health' (25%), 'Agriculture' (24%), 'Community' (15%), and 'Women' (14%).

Examples of Alumni's contributions under the 'Economic' theme include an Alumni who influenced the creation of a national entrepreneurship programme which resulted in increased lending to youths starting their own businesses (also flagged as 'Policy' and 'Youth'). Another Alumni

provided a response describing their work to improve livestock health and productivity through interventions that protect or prevent diseases in pigs and fowl (also coded as 'Health', 'Agriculture', and 'Rural'). In the area of 'Economic' and 'Community' impact one Alumni worked to promote the importance of saving for retirement among their community and worked with community leaders to create a social contributions scheme. Finally, an example of an Alumni whose work falls under 'Economic' and 'Women' (as well as 'Agriculture', 'Rural', and 'Training') co-founded an organisation that trains women living in rural areas in how to practice commercial agriculture, helping improve their standards of living.

Education

'Education' was also mentioned by one-fifth (20%) of respondents. For these responses, the impact has been directly related to the education of others. This theme is most frequently seen in conjunction with 'Children' (27%), 'Policy' (23%), 'Health' (22%), 'Community' (14%), and 'Equity and Access' (14%).

Examples of the work of Distance Learning Alumni in the area of 'Education' include a project to increase enrolment of girls in school and reduce drop-outs (also flagged under the 'Children' theme), substantial reviews of the national curricula for secondary school and teachers college (also under the 'Policy' theme), and securing the re-accreditation of a school of medicine, allowing for greater access to medical training in the region (also included under 'Health'). Another example covering the areas of 'Education' and 'Community', involved an Alumni who developed a community-based project that increased parental involvement in their children's education, improving relationships between communities and their local schools. Finally, one Alumni working in both 'Education' and 'Equity and Access' helped enrol 250 deaf adults in adult education, allowing them to learn sign language and access business opportunities.

Community

Finally, 'Community' was also mentioned at approximately the same rate as the 'Economic' and 'Education' themes, with just under one-fifth (19%) of responses touching upon this area. Responses that fell within this theme touched on how the Alumni's work had an impact at the community level. This theme is frequently found with 'Health' (41%), as well as 'Policy' (20%), 'Environmental' (18%), 'Economic' (15%), 'Education' (14%), and 'Children' (13%).

Examples from Alumni about the work that they do in this area include the implementation of a community health worker project that improved household access to treatments for malaria, diarrhoea, and pneumonia (also coded under 'Health'), running a community-led forest monitoring project that strengthened communities' abilities to defend their rights with respect to their local forests and the policies related to timber rights (also flagged as 'Policy' and 'Environmental' themes), and training older women in a local community in income generating activities, many of whom had already set up a small business at the time of response (also flagged as 'Economic' and 'Women'). One Alumni working in the area of 'Community' and 'Education' designed and supervised the construction of schools and hospitals in their country, improving access to education and health facilities in local communities (also flagged as 'Health' and 'Infrastructure'). Finally, one Alumni working in the area of 'Community' and 'Children' worked to help communities of cocoa farmers create cooperative groups and raise awareness about the practice of child labour in cocoa production, reducing the amount of child labour in local cocoa production (also flagged as 'Agriculture').

Summary

Overall, Distance Learning Alumni continued to have an impact at the Institutional and Local level after their Scholarship, with the proportion reporting impact at these levels remaining consistently high from pre- to post-Scholarship and across all data points. Alumni reported increasing impact at the National and International levels post-Scholarship with the proportion consistently staying above the pre-Scholarship Baseline level. The proportion of Alumni reporting impact in Social Development stayed consistently high across all data points, with the majority of Alumni also consistently reporting impact with respect to Civic Engagement. Alumni reported having an impact in the area of Economic Development at a rate consistently higher than the pre-Scholarship Baseline, and at a rate that trended upwards across the five post-Scholarship data points, while they also reported significantly increased rates of involvement in Policymaking in the initial post-Scholarship survey, which continued to stay well above the pre-Scholarship rate.

Over half of all Alumni reported that their work contributed towards SDG 3 (Good Health and Well-Being) in their survey responses, with approximately one-quarter reporting that they were contributing to each of SDG 4 (Quality Education), SDG 5 (Gender Equality), and SDG 1 (No Poverty). Approximately one-sixth reported contributing towards SDG 2 (Zero Hunger), SDG 6 (Clean Water and Sanitation), SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities), and SDG 13 (Climate Action), while Alumni reported contributing to the remaining SDGs at a rate of one-tenth or less.

Unsurprisingly, the SDGs that the highest proportion of Alumni reported contributing towards are also reflected in the themes arising in Alumni descriptions of their work and development impact. Significant proportions of Alumni reported that they were having an impact that fit under the themes of 'Health', 'Policy', 'Economic', 'Education', and 'Community', with their work often overlapping across multiple themes. Other themes that were mentioned include 'Women', 'Children', 'Government', 'Agriculture', 'Equity and Access' and 'Environmental'. The examples described in this section help to demonstrate the breadth and depth of the work that Distance Learning Alumni are engaged in following their Scholarship but offer only a small glimpse into their overall impact given the sheer number of Commonwealth Distance Learning Scholars that have been funded during the programme's twenty years of existence.

Conclusion

The Commonwealth Distance Learning programme launched in 2001, with the first cohort of 84 Scholars beginning their studies in 2002. To date, 3,793 Scholars from 41 different Commonwealth countries have received funding for their studies. The primary purpose of the programme is to enable development impact in the Commonwealth by providing training that is not otherwise available to skilled and qualified postgraduate students who wish or need to stay in their home country while they study. In many cases, this includes a desire to continue working while they are studying. Based on the findings of this evaluation, the programme is achieving that objective.

The majority of Distance Learning Scholars report that without their Commonwealth Scholarship, they would not have been able to undertake their studies at an institution based in the United Kingdom or elsewhere. The most frequent motivations they gave for applying for their Scholarship were to apply to their particular study programme, to continue to work during their studies, and to apply for either a higher education scholarship generally, a Commonwealth Scholarship specifically, or a distance learning scholarship. Most Scholars continue to remain employed at their job full- or part-time throughout their studies, fulfilling their desire to continue working but also providing an opportunity to immediately apply what they are learning in the workplace.

Both Scholars and Alumni consistently report significant gains to their soft and hard skills and knowledge in areas such as critical thinking, research techniques, technical skills, and leaderships skills. Employers of Scholars who remain working during their studies confirmed that they had observed significant increases to their employees' knowledge and skills, and that their employees' Commonwealth Scholarship met or exceeded their expectations and also brought significant benefits to their workplaces. Not only do both Scholars and Employers consistently report the application of the new knowledge and skills in the workplace, but they also reported that Scholars frequently shared skills and knowledge that they had acquired through their studies with colleagues through both formal and informal training activities. Employers reported that their Scholar's activities improved both the knowledge base of their staff, but also the overall operation of their organisations. These institutional improvements include changes that had been implemented by Scholars in their workplace as a result of the Commonwealth Scholarship learnings, including new policies and practices, new strands of work, and new and strengthened relationships with other organisations both locally and internationally. Every Employer contacted by the CSC said that they would recommend applying for a Commonwealth Scholarship or Fellowship to others.

University Partners reported that Commonwealth Scholars gain a number of benefits from their ability to study at their institutions. These include access to the significant expertise of university staff, the quality of the education that they receive, the cutting-edge nature of the programmes of study on offer, and the career benefits of studying at a prestigious institution. Providers also highlighted a number of benefits to their own institutions and programmes associated with the presence of Commonwealth Distance Learning Scholars. They note that Scholars provide a variety of perspectives to their classes based on their own professional experiences, country contexts, and cultural backgrounds which enrich the learning experience for other students, while broadening the networks that can be created among student cohorts. In a few instances, the funding and students that are provided through the Commonwealth Scholarships help ensure the long-term sustainability of the course, allowing the Provider to continue to offer the programme to other students.

Many UK university Providers also offer their programmes of study in tandem with an international Partner organisation. In these instances, university Providers benefit from the input of their Partner's local knowledge and expertise in the programme design, as well as the Partner's ability to host face-to-face sessions, and to help with Scholar recruitment. Partner organisations similarly benefit from these partnerships by being able to engage in an international partnership, sharing of expertise, and being able to offer pathways to postgraduate learning through scholarships. Both Providers and Partners also reported that the partnership provided opportunities for knowledge exchange, collaboration, and the pursuit of mutual goals. Supporting these partnerships is a secondary goal of the Commonwealth Distance Learning programme, and while not every programme includes a partnership, those that do reported that involvement with the Distance Learning programme has strengthened their partnership and provided opportunities to pursue other collaborations.

A high proportion of Distance Learning Alumni continue to live in their home countries and regions, with almost all who live abroad indicating that they intend to return home within four years. Alumni maintain high rates of employment, although a significant minority also pursue further studies after their Scholarship. While the mix of sectors does change in the post-Scholarship period, Alumni most frequently report that they work in the Public and NGO sectors, although some do transition into the Academic, Multilateral, and Private sectors later in their careers. While many Alumni report falling out of touch with academic contacts in the United Kingdom in the years following the Scholarship, they nevertheless maintain their professional relationships with people in the United Kingdom. Alumni also frequently report strong relationships with other members of the CSC community and professional contacts in third countries.

The work of Alumni post-Scholarship cuts across many different areas of development. The majority of Alumni report that their work has an impact in the areas of Social Development, Civic Engagement, Economic Development, and Policymaking and at the Institutional, Local, National and International levels. These include significant concentrations in the areas of health, policy, economic impact, education, and community, which is also reflected in the Sustainable Development Goals that Alumni most-commonly reported contributing towards. While Alumni are contributing to all SDGs, 'Good Health and Well-being', 'Quality Education', 'Gender Equality' and 'No Poverty' are the ones most frequently mentioned. It is this demonstrable and varied development impact that is the long-term goal of the Commonwealth Distance Learning programme.

Overall, the Commonwealth Distance Learning Scholarship is characterised by a number of unique features compared to other Commonwealth Scholarship programmes (and indeed other international mobility scholarships in general). Many Scholars are drawn to the flexibility offered by the mode of study, the ability to study part-time, and the ability to complete the programme at a level of qualification that aligns with their academic and professional goals. This allows Scholars to pursue an educational opportunity that would otherwise not be available to them due to a desire or need to concurrently work alongside their studies, or other obligations or responsibilities that prevent them from travelling to study abroad.

The ability to work concurrently during their studies also allows Scholars and their Employers to begin realising the benefits of the Commonwealth Scholarship almost immediately. Not only do Scholars gain knowledge and skills that they immediately apply within their work, but they also frequently pass the knowledge and skills on to their colleagues and make changes to improve workplace practices, activities that Employers recognise as providing wider benefits to their

organisations. Employers also reported that their organisations become more internationally oriented due to the Scholarship, providing reputational enhancements and pathways for more collaborations. These multifaceted and wide-ranging benefits mean that the ripple effect of the Commonwealth Distance Learning Scholarship goes much further than just the development and growth of the Scholar themselves. It expands ever further once the Scholar becomes an Alumni, as they continue to apply their knowledge and skills in a development context, ultimately creating impact in their home countries and regions, and contributing towards the mission of the Sustainable Development Goals to 'achieve a better and more sustainable future for all'.

Appendix 1 – Scholarships Allocated by Institution

Institution	Count
University of Edinburgh	337
Leeds Beckett University	251
The Open University	236
University of Stirling	185
UCL Institute of Education	184
London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine	175
London South Bank University	160
University of Southampton	150
University of York	140
Bangor University	136
University of Dundee	135
University of Sunderland	135
Imperial College London at Wye	134
Staffordshire University	129
Cardiff University	123
Royal Veterinary College	113
University of Manchester	95
University of Bath	93
University of Liverpool	85
Loughborough University	83
University of Oxford	73
SOAS, University of London	71
University of Strathclyde	68

Institution	Count
University of St Andrews	61
Queen Mary University of London	59
University College London	51
University of Leicester	44
University of Nottingham	38
University of Birmingham	37
Lancaster University	31
School of Advanced Study, University of London	26
Liverpool School of Tropical Medicine	25
University of Aberdeen	25
Birkbeck, University of London	19
University of Bolton	18
Queen's University Belfast	16
Ulster University	15
University of Portsmouth	8
Aberystwyth University	6
Coventry University	6
University of Salford	6
Teesside University	5
University of Sheffield	4
Aston University	1
University of Warwick	1

Appendix 2 – Scholarships Allocated by Programme

Programme and Institution	Count
Education for Sustainability (London South Bank University)	160
Development Management (The Open University)	130
Sustainable Development (Staffordshire University)	123
Tropical Forestry (Bangor University)	99
Gerontology (University of Southampton)	98
Veterinary Epidemiology and Public Health (Royal Veterinary College)	97
Public Health (Leeds Beckett University)	89
Education and International Development (UCL Institute of Education)	87
Nursing (University of Dundee)	85
Aquatic Resource Development (University of Stirling)	84
International Animal Health (University of Edinburgh)	83
Computer Based Information Systems (University of Sunderland)	82
Dementia Studies (University of Stirling)	75
Public Health (University of Liverpool)	75
International Human Rights Law (University of Oxford)	73
Epidemiology (London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine)	69
Public Policy and Management (University of York)	62
Sustainable Aquaculture (University of St Andrews)	61
Palliative Medicine/Care (Cardiff University)	54
Water and Environmental Management (Loughborough University)	51
International Construction Management (University of Bath)	46
Poverty Reduction: Policy and Practice (SOAS, University of London)	45
Responsible Tourism Management (Leeds Beckett University)	45
Environmental Management (The Open University)	43
Public Health (London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine)	42
International Primary Health Care (University College London)	41

Programme and Institution	Count
Public Health Promotion (Leeds Beckett University)	40
Education (University of Nottingham)	38
International Development (University of York)	36
Risk, Crisis and Disaster Management (University of Leicester)	35
International Development (Conflict, Security and Development) (University of Birmingham)	34
Clinical Trials (London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine)	33
Public Health and Primary Care (University of Manchester)	33
Construction Management (University of Bath)	32
Information Systems Engineering (University of Sunderland)	32
Education, Gender and International Development (UCL Institute of Education)	31
Facilities Management (Leeds Beckett University)	30
Infection Prevention and Control (University of Dundee)	28
Public Health (University of Manchester)	28
Forestry (Bangor University)	27
Global Ageing and Policy (University of Southampton)	27
Infectious Diseases (London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine)	27
International Education and Development (UCL Institute of Education)	27
Finance (University of Strathclyde)	26
Managing Rural Development (Imperial College London at Wye)	26
Refugee Protection and Forced Migration Studies (School of Advanced Study, University of London)	26
Global Health (Liverpool School of Tropical Medicine)	25
Sustainable Development (Imperial College London at Wye)	25
Clinical Optometry (Cardiff University)	24
Public Health (University of Edinburgh)	23
Education, Health Promotion and International Development (UCL Institute of Education)	22
Health Promotion/Environmental Health (Leeds Beckett University)	22

Programme and Institution	Count
Palliative Medicine (Cardiff University)	22
Sustainable Agriculture and Rural Development (Imperial College London at Wye)	22
Information Technology Management (University of Sunderland)	21
Management and Information Systems: Change and Development (University of Manchester)	21
Aquaculture (University of Stirling)	19
Environmental Management (Imperial College London at Wye)	19
Structural Molecular Biology (Birkbeck, University of London)	19
Education (University of Bolton)	18
Global Health and Infectious Disease (University of Edinburgh)	18
Global Health and Infectious Diseases (University of Edinburgh)	18
Educational Planning, Economics and International Development (UCL Institute of Education)	17
Palliative Care (Cardiff University)	17
Global Food Security (Food Safety) (Queen's University Belfast)	16
Surgical Sciences (University of Edinburgh)	16
Advanced Network Computing (The Open University)	15
Carbon Management (University of Edinburgh)	15
Global Health (University of Edinburgh)	15
International Humanitarian Affairs (University of York)	15
Livestock Health and Production (Royal Veterinary College)	15
One Health (University of Edinburgh)	15
Online and Distance Education (The Open University)	15
programmes across One Health, One Medicine (University of Edinburgh)	15
Public Administration (The Open University)	15
Agribusiness for Development (Imperial College London at Wye)	14
Family Medicine (University of Edinburgh)	14
Health Promotion/ Environmental Health (Leeds Beckett University)	14
Conservation Medicine (University of Edinburgh)	13
Clinical Nutrition (University of Aberdeen)	12
Environmental Toxicology and Pollution Monitoring (Ulster University)	12

Programme and Institution	Count
Medical Leadership (Lancaster University)	12
Palliative Care (University of Dundee)	12
Water and Waste Engineering (Loughborough University)	12
Endocrinology and Diabetes (Queen Mary University of London)	11
General Surgery (University of Edinburgh)	11
Public Administration (International Development) (University of York)	11
Public Health - Health Promotion (Leeds Beckett University)	11
Trauma Sciences (Queen Mary University of London)	11
Water Management for Development (Loughborough University)	11
Agroforestry and Food Security (Bangor University)	10
Global Challenges (University of Edinburgh)	10
Hydrogeology (University of Strathclyde)	10
Integrated Environmental Management (University of Bath)	10
Neonatology (University of Southampton)	10
Primary Health Care (University College London)	10
Public Health (University of Aberdeen)	10
Biodiversity Conservation and Management (Imperial College London at Wye)	9
Clinical Education (University of Edinburgh)	9
Global Development Management (The Open University)	9
Managing Rural Development (SOAS, University of London)	9
Public Policy and Management (SOAS, University of London)	9
Biodiversity Wildlife and Ecosystem Health (University of Edinburgh)	8
Bioinformatics (University of Manchester)	8
Emergency and Resuscitation Medicine (Queen Mary University of London)	8
Gastroenterology (Queen Mary University of London)	8
Global Ageing and Policy (Distance Learning) (University of Southampton)	8
Global Health: Global Health and Non-Communicable Diseases (University of Edinburgh)	8
Gerontology (Distance Learning) (University of Southampton)	7
IT and Telecommunications/Internet Law and Policy (University of Strathclyde)	7

Programme and Institution	Count	Programme and Institution	Count
Online and Distance Education (MAODE) (The Open University)	7	Public Administration International Development (MPA) (University of York)	5
Orthopaedic Trauma Science (Queen Mary University of London)	7	Public Financial Management (SOAS, University of London)	5
Paediatric Emergency Medicine (University of Edinburgh)	7	Cancer and Clinical Oncology (Queen Mary University of London)	4
Professional Practice (Leadership and Management in Healthcare) (Lancaster University)	7	Global Health and Non-Communicable Diseases (University of Edinburgh)	4
Agricultural Economics (Imperial College London at Wye)	6	Heritage and Interpretation (University of Leicester)	4
Leadership Practice (Healthcare Improvement) (Lancaster University)	6	Hydrogeology Distance Learning (University of Strathclyde)	4
Palliative Medicine for Healthcare Professionals (Cardiff University)	6	International Animal Welfare, Ethics and Law (University of Edinburgh)	4
Professional Practice in Leadership and Management (Healthcare) (Lancaster University)	6	International Relations (Staffordshire University)	4
Prosthetics, Orthotics and Rehabilitation Studies (University of Strathclyde)	6	Midwifery (University of Sheffield)	4
Public Administration (University of York)	6	Prosthetic and Orthotic Rehabilitation Studies (University of Strathclyde)	4
Trauma and Orthopaedics (University of Edinburgh)	6	Urology (University of Edinburgh)	4
Water Engineering for Development (Loughborough University)	6	BIM and Digital Built Environments (University of Salford)	3
Biodiversity, Wildlife and Ecosystem Health (University of Edinburgh)	5	Biodiversity Conservation (Imperial College London at Wye)	3
Burn Care (Queen Mary University of London)	5	Biomedical Science (Ulster University)	3
Cancer and Therapeutics (Queen Mary University of London)	5	Finance (SOAS, University of London)	3
Clinical Management of Pain (University of Edinburgh)	5	Global Health Policy (London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine)	3
Clinical Research (University of Liverpool)	5	Information and Library Studies (Aberystwyth University)	3
Global eHealth (University of Edinburgh)	5	International Development (University of Birmingham)	3
Global Issues in Gerontology and Ageing (University of Stirling)	5	International Development studies (University of Portsmouth)	3
Humanitarianism, Conflict and Development (University of Bath)	5	Library and Information Systems (Aberystwyth University)	3
Infection (University of Dundee)	5	Management of Health Systems (University of Liverpool)	3
Infection: Prevention and Control (University of Dundee)	5	Maritime Security (Coventry University)	3
International Development (University of Portsmouth)	5	Master of Public Health (University of Aberdeen)	3
Management and Information Systems: Change and Development (University of Manchester)	5	Peace and Conflict Studies (Coventry University)	3
Managing Rural Change (Imperial College London at Wye)	5	Project Management in Construction (University of Salford)	3
Master of Public Health (Teesside University)	5	Rehabilitation Studies (University of Strathclyde)	3
Police Leadership and Management (University of Leicester)	5	Biodiversity Wildlife and Ecosystem Health Conservation Medicine (University of Edinburgh)	2
Prosthetics and Orthotics Rehabilitation Studies (University of Strathclyde)	5	Conflict and Development (The Open University)	2
Public Administration - International Development (University of York)	5	Food Chain Management (Imperial College London at Wye)	2

Programme and Institution	Count
International Policy and Diplomacy (Staffordshire University)	2
International Public Health (University of Liverpool)	2
Internet Law and Policy (University of Strathclyde)	2
Renewable Energy System Technology (Loughborough University)	2
Agribusiness Management (Imperial College London at Wye)	1
Applied Environmental Economics (Imperial College London at Wye)	1
Aquatic Resources Development (University of Stirling)	1
Demography and Health (London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine)	1
Digital Education (University of Edinburgh)	1
Engineering Business Management (University of Warwick)	1

Programme and Institution	Count
Food Industry Management and Marketing (Imperial College London at Wye)	1
Global perspectives on ageing and dementia (University of Stirling)	1
Information Technology and Telecommunications Law (University of Strathclyde)	1
Infrastructure in Emergencies (Loughborough University)	1
International Animal Welfare Ethics and Law (University of Edinburgh)	1
Livestock Production and Health (Royal Veterinary College)	1
TESOL (Aston University)	1
Trauma and Orthopaedics Surgery (University of Edinburgh)	1
Vascular and Endovascular Surgery (University of Edinburgh)	1