

Consultation on Future Time Limited Programme Themes

Alumni Advisory Panel Report 2021-2023 Panel



Executive Summary

The CSC's Alumni Advisory Panel provides a platform for Commonwealth Alumni to support the future of the programme and its Scholars by sharing personal insight and expertise to contribute to the development of CSC activities. Panel members are appointed for a two-year term and are expected to advise on at least one activity per year. The panel is comprised of 97 members.

The CSC's Time Limited Programme (TLP) is a theme-specific programme and encompasses a range of activities under a priority area. The CSC has allocated a portion of funding to run a TLP since 2018 and the Commission has committed to continue offering a TLP in each year of its new Strategy 2022-2025. Recent programmes have focused on Girls' Education (2021), Clean Energy, Air and Oceans (2022), and LGBT+ Rights in the Commonwealth (2023). At the December 2022 Commission meeting the theme of Entrepreneurship, Innovation and Job Creation was agreed for 2024.

Each year the Commission is presented with a number of options for future topics for a TLP. The Secretariat, FCDO, and Commission collaborate to consider pressing issues facing the world, and particularly the Commonwealth, that the TLP presents a good opportunity to focus on.

Members of the Alumni Advisory Panel 2021-2023 were invited to share ideas and discuss possible themes for future TLPs and thoughts on particular activities and opportunities that could be held during a TLP year.

Methodology

Panel members were invited to attend one of two focus group discussions to share their thoughts on possible themes for future TLPs and suggestion related activities. In advance of the focus group discussions, panel members were asked submit ideas for discussion.

The task was open to all panel members. 30 panel members registered, a response rate of 31%, and 11 attended, an uptake of 37%.

As part of the consultation, the following document was shared with participating panel members:

- Time Limited Programme overview

Results

Key topics discussed in both focus groups are presented below under over-arching thematic areas.

Public Health

It was suggested that a future TLP could bring together a diverse range of participants to discuss the **healthcare struggles in different contexts**, notably a focus on Small Island States and how they approach challenges in healthcare delivery.

Trauma is a significant cause of death in low income countries and many have poor systems in place to support rehabilitation of survivors. Bringing people together to share these challenges and discuss ways to resolve these and/or to work together would be valuable.

Raising awareness of **mental health challenges** across countries, communities, and genders could be another valuable TLP. This could include practical training for health professionals on how recognising signs of poor mental health, raising awareness, and highlighting and investing in mechanisms for people to seek appropriate help.

Climate Change

Climate change remains a top priority globally. Discussants shared a number of core areas that could be addressed through a TLP under this broader area.

The impact of **deforestation** across Commonwealth countries and actions to mitigate; the need for **clean energy transition**, with a focus on adoption in low income countries; and a **country-led** climate related TLP, enabling participants to set the agenda based on the specific climate needs of their home country.

Gender

Discussants raised that projects and programmes related to gender are often framed by the disadvantage women face, rather than contexts and opportunities that project women's capabilities.

In response to this, one proposal was for a TLP focused on the **empowerment of older women**, designed to encourage and support mature female students.

Promoting the **financial independence of women** was another topic discussed, which could provide practical support for women to gain independence and the skills to earn their living.

Related to public and mental health, it was discussed that **suicide rates amongst women** in Africa are very high. A TLP designed to address, investigate, and raise awareness of the root causes, such as domestic abuse and femicide, would be an important topic.

General discussion

It was noted by discussants that whilst proposed as a TLP area, **climate change is a cross-cutting issue and should be considered under all future themes**, not just as a theme on its own. Examples discussed included public health, urbanisation and city planning, and refugees.

Discussion also highlighted the **rise of artificial intelligence (AI)** and how the CSC could consider the impact of AI in its work, beyond as a potential TLP theme.

Possible activities to support themes

As part of the advisory panel activity, discussants were asked to consider potential activities that could be delivered as part of a TLP. Suggestions included:

- Community engagement and smaller scale activities
- Webinars designed to connect Commonwealth Scholars and Alumni
- Coaching sessions
- Fellowships to bring people together and discuss challenges and solutions. It was noted that these did not have to bring people together in the UK.
- Mentorship
- Practical based programmes e.g. tree planting if deforestation was selected as a thematic area/part of a theme

Summary

Through the two focus group discussions, Alumni Advisory Panel members raised key themes, some of which were inter-connected or could be integrated in a wider theme.

The groups identified the need to continue the focus on climate change and how this affects all areas of life, and emphasised the importance of integrating this into any future TLP. It is noted that Climate Change and Gender have been the focus of recent TLPs, however there are

opportunities to present these to the Commission again with a different focus and/or integrated in other themes.

A number of discussants mentioned delivering activities at the community level or offering practical workshops or activities for people within country. These types of activity could be supported through the Alumni Community Engagement Fund (ACEF), which currently includes funding for TLP-themed ACEF activities. The CSC can consider this to a greater extent in future TLP proposals, however these projects are dependent upon alumni to deliver in country.

Webinars and Fellowships were identified as very valuable activities to support the TLP and the CSC will ensure that these are included in future proposals where appropriate.

Public Health has not been a specific focus of previous TLPs and is something the CSC can explore, alongside other areas suggested by the panel.

Next steps

The CSC will take forward the key themes discussed during the panel activity to be further developed and presented to the Commission for consideration as future TLP themes. Proposals will be presented in December 2024 and will include climate change and gender with a possible alternative focus than in previous programmes, alongside public health.

Ideas which hold great value but may not lend themselves directly to TLP activities will be shared across teams to explore whether these could be incorporated into other CSC work, for example as ACEF funded projects.