



COMMONWEALTH
SCHOLARSHIPS

Development of the CSC Alumni Engagement Strategy 2025-2028

Alumni Advisory Panel
Report 2023-2025 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 117 members.

In April 2025, the CSC will launch a new three-year Alumni Engagement Strategy designed to continue to support and engage Commonwealth Alumni. The strategy will build on the successes of the previous strategy spanning 2022-2025 and potentially introduce new engagement opportunities for alumni.

As part of the strategy development, the CSC Alumni Team have conducted an evaluation of the current strategy to assess the extent to which its objectives have been met and the value of activities to alumni and the Commission. Findings from this evaluation will be used to inform the new strategy, alongside wider research and feedback from Commonwealth Alumni.

Members of the Alumni Advisory Panel 2021-2023 were invited to feed-into the development of the new three-year Alumni Engagement Strategy by providing reflections and feedback on the current strategy and evaluation findings.

This activity is the first of a series of consultations with the Alumni Advisory Panel to develop the Alumni Engagement Strategy 2025-2028.

Methodology

Panel members were asked to complete an online survey consisting of multiple choice and open-ended qualitative questions. The questions were aimed at understanding current engagement levels and awareness of existing alumni engagement opportunities, identifying activities to retain in a future strategy based on personal engagement, evaluation findings and strategic objectives, exploring challenges in delivering alumni activities, and recommending new activities.

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

- CSC Alumni Engagement Strategy 2022-2025
- Draft Evaluation Report on the CSC Alumni Engagement Strategy 2022-2025

The task was open to all panel members. 42 completed the survey and submitted feedback, a response rate of 36%.

Results

Key findings from the survey are summarised below under the following headings: Self-assessment; Reflecting on the current Alumni Engagement Strategy 2022-2025; Understanding challenges; New and additional opportunities for engagement; Final comments and feedback; Summary; and Next steps.

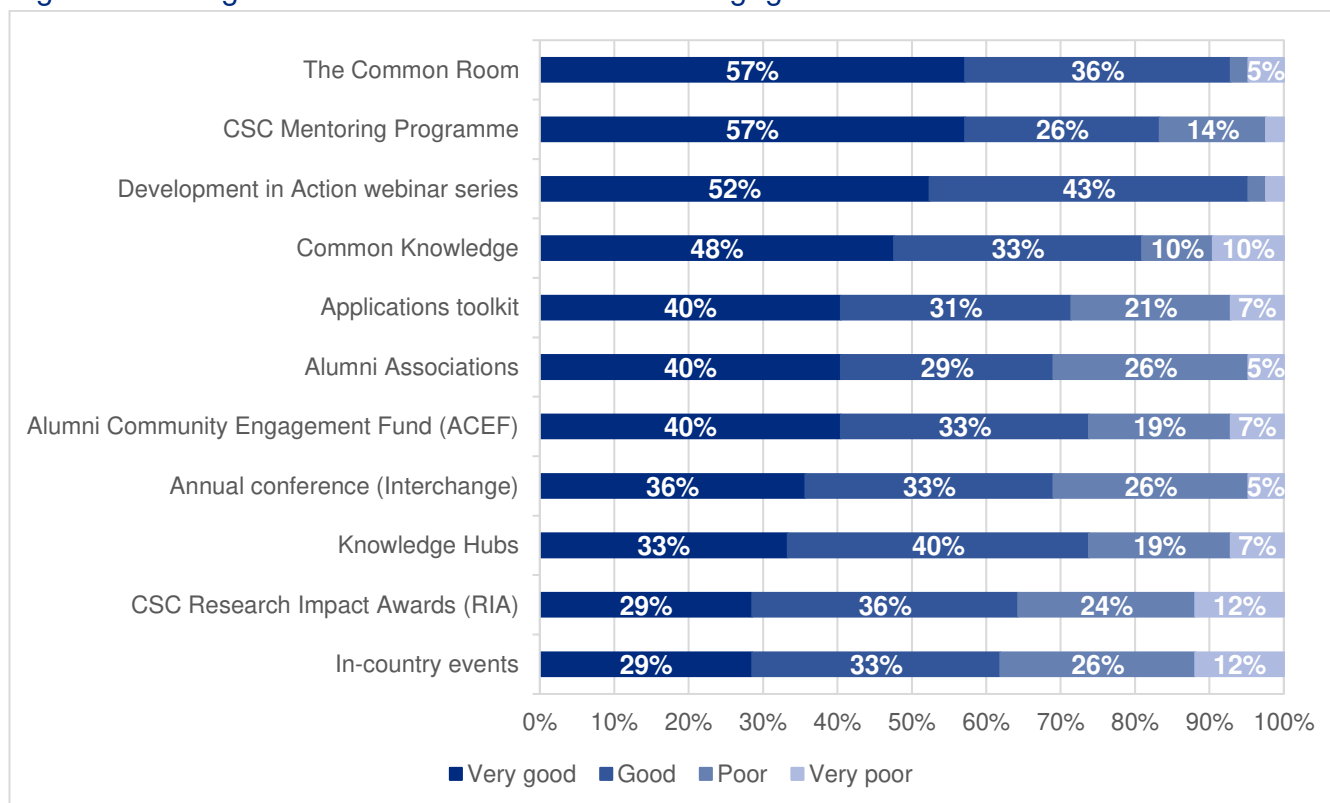
Self-assessment

To understand awareness of existing alumni activities, respondents were asked a series of questions about their engagement in alumni activities over the last year. Note, the Alumni Advisory Panel was removed as an activity option for this exercise as all respondents are members of the panel.

As evidenced in Figure 1, respondents demonstrated good awareness of key alumni engagement activities available to all Commonwealth Alumni, such as publications (The Common Room quarterly mailing and Common Knowledge magazine), the annual CSC Mentoring Programme and monthly Development in Action webinar series. There was notable awareness of the Applications Toolkit, Alumni Associations and Alumni Community Engagement Fund.

Respondents were less aware of the CSC Research Impact Awards (RIA) and in-country events. Reasons for this may be that RIA is open to current doctoral scholars and alumni up to 10-years post-studies, meaning it has a very specific audience for delivery. In-country events are also not delivered as standard in all Commonwealth countries and in some countries delivery is not consistent.

Figure 1- Rating of awareness of current alumni engagement activities



n=42

Respondents were asked to elaborate on their ratings. Regular mailings from the CSC were the main channel reported for finding out about activities, however many respondents noted that more ongoing visibility of activities would support greater awareness. A few respondents shared that although they were aware of activities, it wasn't always clear how they could get involved and that greater emphasis on volunteerism would be useful.

In-country events and alumni associations were noted as areas for improvement. Whilst in-country events for alumni are not currently delivered in all countries, those who had been invited to attend these shared challenges related to late invitations, preference for big city locations only and a lack of coordination in delivery. Some respondents shared frustrations at the lack of active alumni associations in-country and advised greater resourcing to be made available to support these.

One respondent noted that it was hard to keep track of all the activities available and to understand how these were distinct but connected as part of a wider programme or strategy.

'I am very aware of many of the activities because I actively read newsletters about them.'

'I have been engaged in the mentoring program twice. I always attend the development in action webinar and found them interesting and educative.'

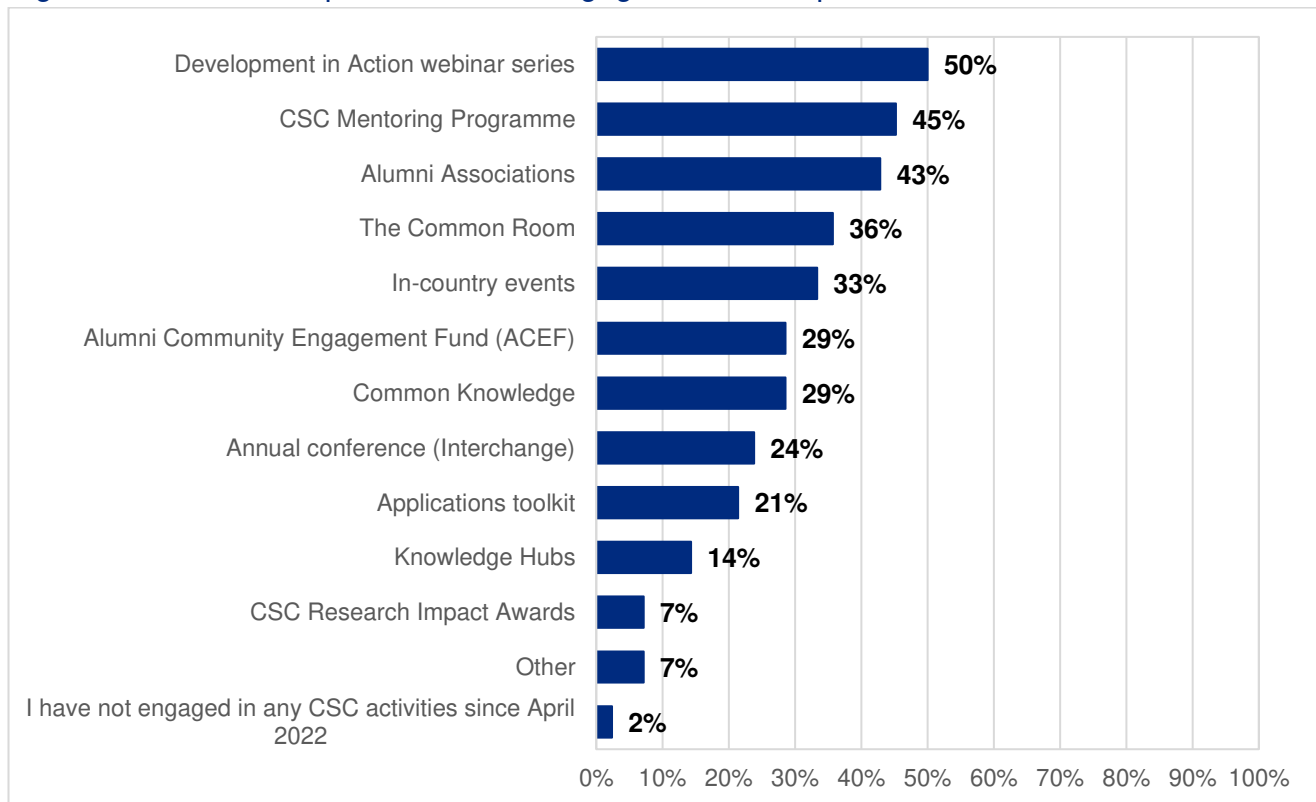
'Frankly, it's difficult to keep track of all these programs, and to understand how they are each distinct but connected.'

‘For over TEN years now I have followed the activities of the CSC. I am very much knowledgeable of the Commission's many activities; I have even led some of these and I continue to do so.’

Where respondents had rated their awareness of activities as ‘Poor’ or ‘Very poor’, they were asked which of these they would be interested in learning more about. Activities with the highest score included in-country events, Alumni Community Engagement Fund, CSC Mentoring Programme, and Knowledge Hubs. The Common Room and Common Knowledge received the lowest interest for more information.

To understand engagement and uptake of the activities listed, respondents were asked which, if any, activities they had engaged in since April 2022 to date (covering the strategy period).

Figure 2- Activities respondents have engaged in since April 2022



n=42

Only a small number of respondents had not engaged in any activities since April 2022. Activities with the highest reported engagement and uptake were similar to those with the highest awareness levels. Respondents who selected ‘Other’ shared the Alumni Advisory Panel and CSC Cumberland Lodge workshops which alumni have supported as guest speakers.

Respondents were asked to summarise their engagement in the activities selected and share the extent to which they had enjoyed or gained insight from participation, and/or why they had not engaged. For the purpose of this question, engagement could be defined as submitting an application to participate, attending events, reading information, and intending to engage (such as registering to attend an event but later being unable to do so).

Many respondents reflected on their experiences as Mentors on the CSC Mentoring Programme, sharing that this was an opportunity to share their knowledge, meet new scholars and learn from their Mentees. A small number of respondents noted they had applied for this opportunity but had been unsuccessful, reflecting the current over-subscription for the programme.

Similarly, a small number of respondents shared being unsuccessful for the Alumni Community Engagement Fund, another oversubscribed programme. One respondent noted that receiving feedback on their application would be useful for future applications and as a way of learning from the experience.

A large number of respondents commented that they actively read communications from the CSC which they find interesting and informative, with one respondent sharing that the mailings often made them nostalgic for their time in the UK. For many respondents, scheduling conflicts were the main reason preventing them from participating in live activities, such as in-country events and the Development in Action webinar series. A few respondents reporting signing up for activities which they later could not attend.

Whilst engagement with virtual activities was strong amongst respondents, a couple noted that virtual fatigue was an ongoing challenge and that more in-person activities would be appreciated. Where respondents were active leaders or members of their alumni association they shared positive engagement with alumni, particularly in increasing their networks, as well as with new scholars and potential applicants, with positive experiences of utilising the Applications Toolkit.

‘I am a Mentor for the CSC Master’s programme for three years now. The mentoring programme enables me to interact with others, learn from each other, share experiences and guide aspiring students to be able to complete their studies.’

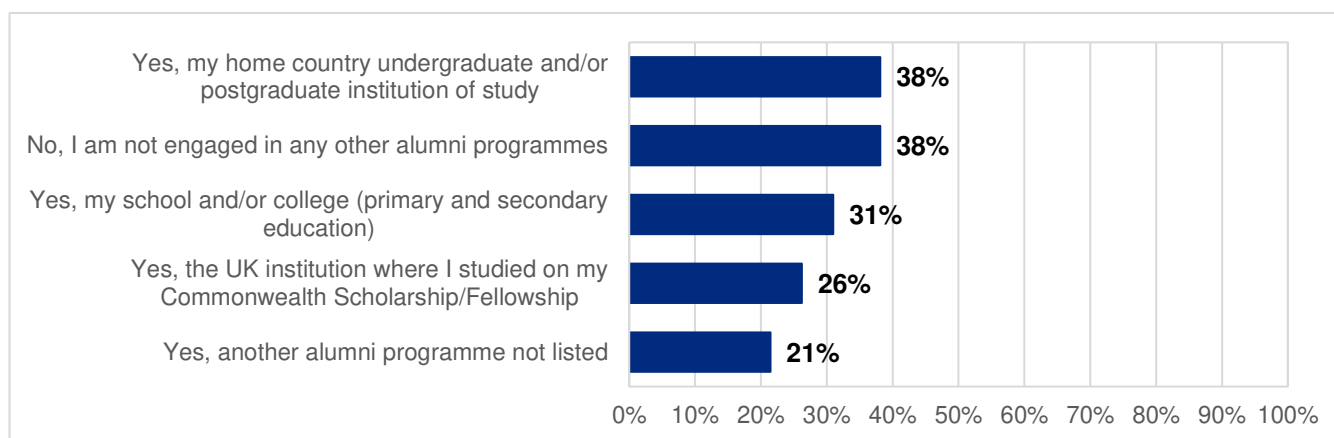
‘I actively engage in the CSC mentoring program and go through the magazine (Common Knowledge) and the quarterly newsletter (The Common Room) from time to time. I would love to engage in some of the other activities but more often than not have conflicting schedules.’

‘My engagement has largely been reading about CSC activities and taking part in webinar series’ online - I believe there is much more scope for active engagement such as in-person meetings.’

‘I’ve been simply trying to do my part when I can.’

Many Commonwealth Alumni are members of more than one alumni programme. It is important to understand the extent to which respondents were engaged in other alumni programmes to gauge their availability to participate in CSC alumni activities and the value of these compared to other offers. As evidenced in Figure 3, a high number of respondents are engaged in other alumni programmes, however they still remain active in the CSC’s programme, highlighting the different or complementary opportunities and value this programme offers.

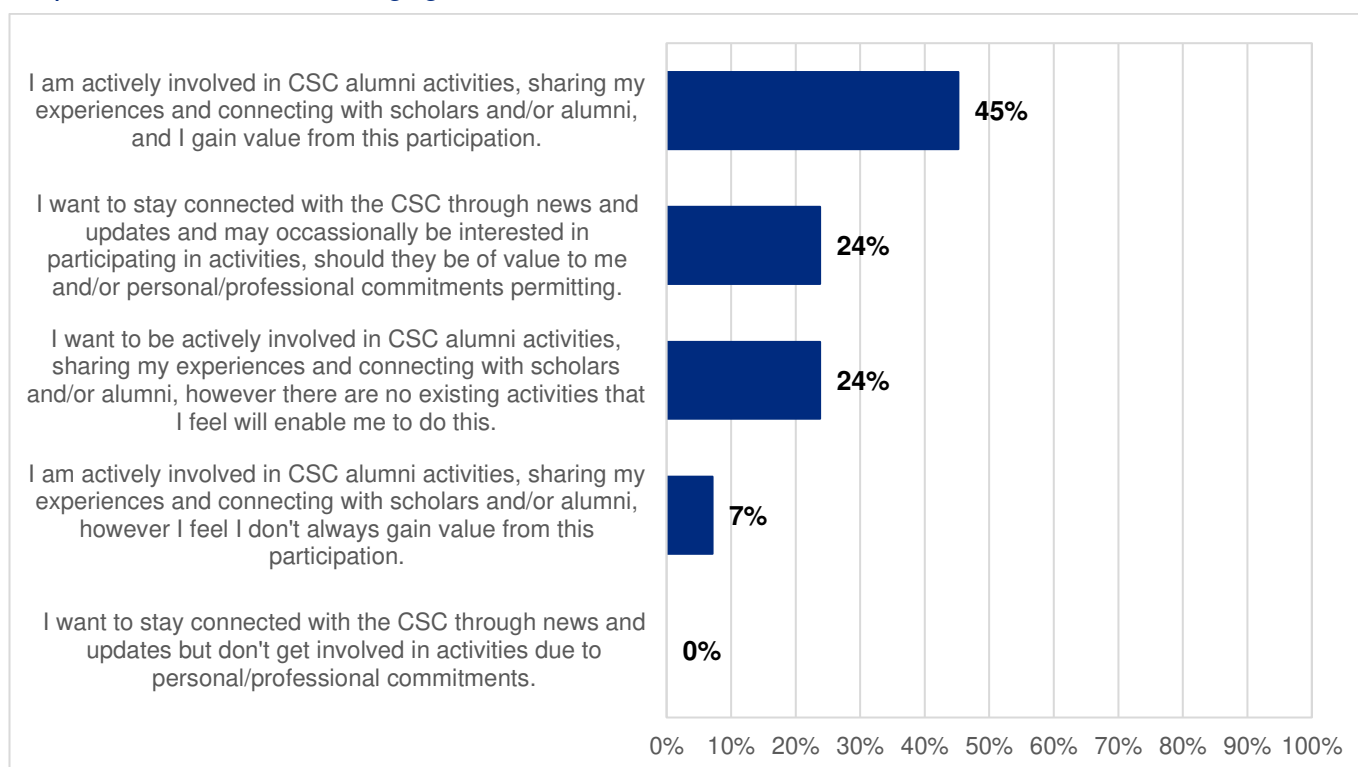
Figure 3- Other alumni programmes respondents are engaged in



n=42

The final questions in the ‘Self-assessment’ section asked respondents to reflect on their current engagement in CSC alumni activities and the extent to which they do and/or want to engage. Respondents were asked to select a pre-prepared statement which best describes this.

Figure 4- Statement on current engagement in CSC alumni activities and the extent to which respondents do/want to engage



n=42

Positively, just under half of respondents (45%) felt they were actively engaged in CSC alumni activities and that they gained value from this participation and just under a quarter of respondents (24%) want to stay connected with the CSC to enable them to participate in activities should they be of value.

The same number of respondents reported wanting to be engaged in CSC activities but felt that there were no activities available that would enable them to share their experiences and

connect with scholars and/or alumni. A small number of felt that despite actively engaging in CSC activities, they didn't always gain value from participation.

Despite some respondents sharing in a previous question that scheduling often prevented participation in activities, no respondents reported this to be a significant barrier to their engagement overall.

Respondents were invited to share further comments or reflections on the statement they selected. Of those who shared comments, a small number noted that more tailored activities would potentially increase their engagement, such as activities delivered in-country and/or specific to their field or specialisation. One respondent felt that the activities available were too academic and research focused which did not match with their current work and another noted that the changes made to the CSC Research Impact Awards had meant they no longer felt eligible or inclined to participate.

Where alumni were actively engaged and gaining value from activities, they shared those activities had contributed to their personal and professional development.

One respondent raised an important note about representation of countries in CSC activities, particularly events. They noted that countries and regions with a higher number of Commonwealth Scholars and Alumni received more opportunities for in-country engagement, making others feel left out and less important. This is further investigated in the section 'Understanding challenges' later in this report.

'I would like more tailored opportunities to engage - for example on topics that may be relevant to my professional interests (politics).'

'I really would like to become more involved, hence deciding to apply to be a member of the Advisory Panel, However, feel that many of the activities are focused on those in academia or in the research field, therefore as someone who doesn't work in this field, these activities are not really targeted at me and don't bring value. I also feel that there is a focus on the regions with higher numbers of scholars, so being from a less represented region makes me feel almost like a "second-class citizen" amongst Commonwealth Scholars and the organised events.'

'I am engaged in the CSC activities, found it valuable in improving my personal and professional development.'

Reflecting on the current Alumni Engagement Strategy 2022-2025

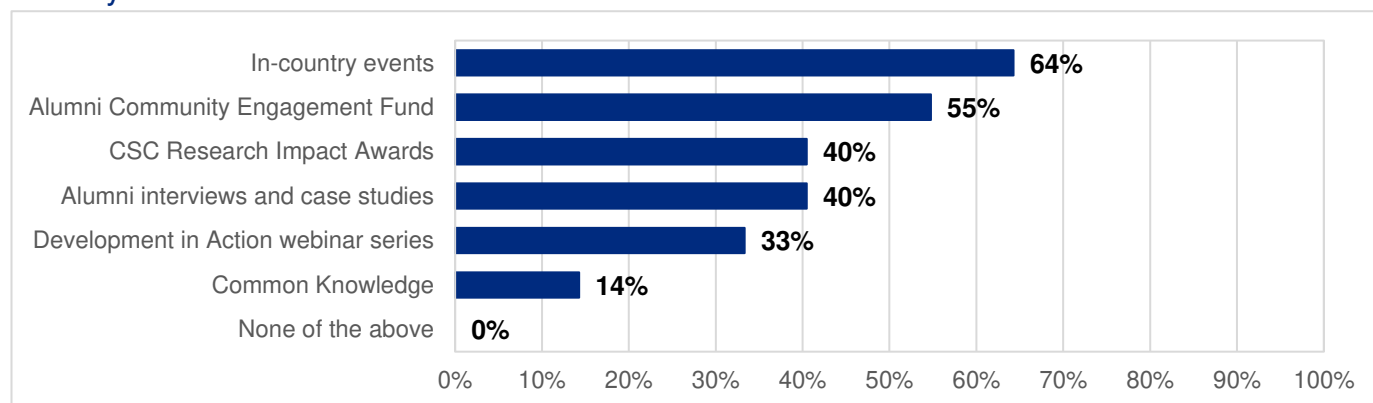
To complete this section, respondents were asked to read the findings in the 'Draft Evaluation Report on the CSC Alumni Engagement Strategy 2022-2025', as well as draw on their own thoughts and experiences of engaging with the CSC as an alumnus.

Respondents were asked to review the activities delivered under the strategy's three objectives and, based on their personal engagement and expectations of an alumni programme and the findings outlined in the draft evaluation report, select the activities they felt should be prioritised for delivery in the next alumni engagement strategy.

Respondents could select no more than 3 activities per objective. For each objective, respondents were asked to elaborate on their selections and indicate where they were drawing on personal experiences.

Objective 1: Alumni collaborating and applying their knowledge and expertise to address critical global challenges

Figure 5- Activities under Objective 1 which respondents feel should be prioritised for future delivery



n=42

In-country events received the highest priority amongst respondents for retainment under Objective 1. Many respondents do not already have access to these opportunities making this selection a priority for retainment but also development.

The Alumni Community Engagement Fund was the second highest rated priority activity, followed by CSC Research Impact Awards and alumni interviews case studies. Interestingly, despite high uptake reported amongst respondents, the Development in Action webinar series did not receive a high rating, with Common Knowledge the lowest rated activity.

‘The interviews and case studies are a concrete way for alumni to see what others have done with their awards and offer an opportunity to showcase what you have done with yours. I also think that in-country events (particularly in-person) should be a good way to network and to learn from each other.’

‘Despite not considering applying for RIA anymore, I believe these awards may be a good outlet for the alumni to showcase their innovative research and receive the appreciation that their work deserves. It also increases the chances of entering into collaborative research by like-minded researchers of similar interest from different countries. Similarly, Development in Action webinars are thought-provoking and may increase collaborative opportunities.’

‘The Alumni and Alumni Association outlook reflects the quality of CSC inputs. I strongly believe the Alumni and Alumni Association in particular should be further engaged and supported through the various relevant CSC activities.’

‘In-country events such as a conference bringing together Alumni of diverse areas to brainstorm on issues peculiar to the country and finding ways to solve the problems. Products from these events in the past have aided in policy and decision making by the respective governments.’

‘The RIA is essential because it shows that CSC is very interested in the outstanding works and impacts of Alumni post-scholarship. It is also a way to keep alumni connected to CSC. Like the RIA, the ACEF is an ingenious programme. Supporting alumni to carry out community engagement is a way to showcase CSC commitment to solving societal problems and creating impacts. Finally, the Common Knowledge magazine is very important because through it, scholars and alumni are kept abreast on CSC activities and other exciting opportunities they can be part of.’

Respondents highlighted the importance of in-country events in connecting alumni, collectively discussing and contributing to solutions to development issues in their home countries, promoting expertise, and increasingly visibility of Commonwealth Scholarships and their impact. A few respondents urged for more in-person events, as well as more coordinated and comprehensive event programming.

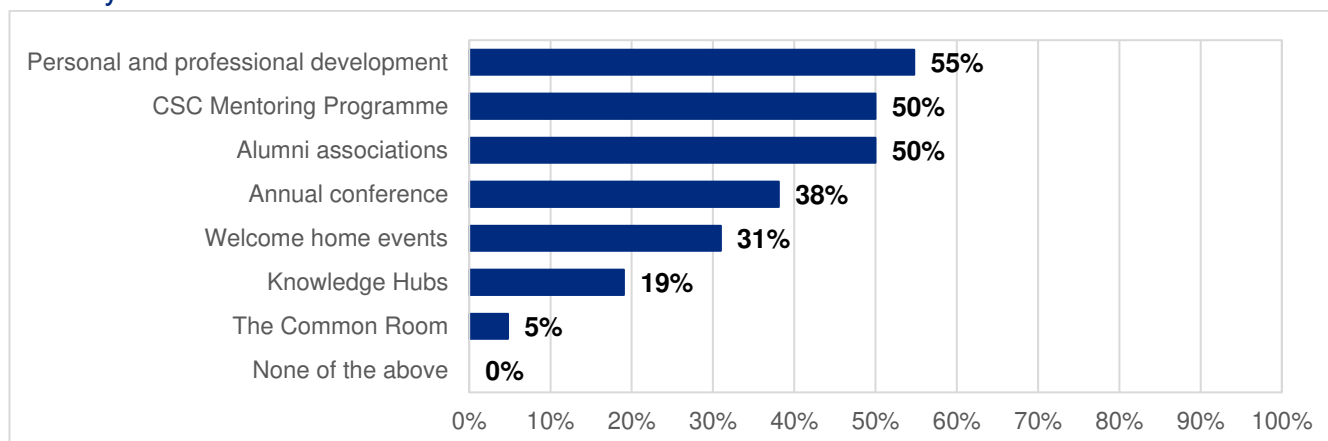
Alumni interviews and the stories produced through this activity was widely cited in responses, with respondents noting the importance of these in promoting the impact of Commonwealth Scholarships and contributions of individuals. The community focus of the Alumni Community Engagement Fund was seen as valuable to alumni and in promoting grassroots activities and community engagement.

The CSC Research Impact Awards received the highest number of comments from respondents. It was felt these were an important way of celebrating and recognising research conducted by Commonwealth Alumni and demonstrate the CSC’s ongoing interest in the work of alumni post-scholarship. The eligibility of the awards and judging criteria was raised as potentially limiting, with some respondents urging a review of the awards if they were to continue.

Although not rating in the top 3 activities for priorities, the Development in Action webinar series received positive endorsement through the comments, although the decline in uptake over the last year was cited by one respondent as evidence it may no longer be of interest or a trend towards more in-person events post-COVID.

Objective 2: Alumni increasing personal and professional development to become leaders in sustainable development through the CSC Alumni Network

Figure 6- Activities under Objective 2 which respondents feel should be prioritised for future delivery



n=42

Personal professional development resources, the CSC Mentoring Programme and Alumni Associations were clear priorities under Objective 2. Comments on the lack of engagement within Knowledge Hubs supports their low rating, although in their open comments, respondents felt these groups were important.

The Common Room received the lowest priority rating, however responses to previous questions indicate these mailings are well read and of interest and serve an important function in keeping alumni informed of news and updates.

‘The conference gives an opportunity for diverse professionals to interact, share information and experience. While the mentoring programme is a very important opportunity that brings diverse students and mentors to be able go through their studies smoothly without mayor challenges. The Association continue to bridge, accelerate ideas towards collective action.’

‘Personal and professional development resources was very helpful over the past years for me. The Open University Courses on Personal Branding and Resilience truly helped me in last few months. CSC should focus more on these resources and offer weekend (so that it is out of the alumni's office hours) career workshops.’

‘When I was finished with my award and subsequently my degree, I was truly confused as to what my next steps should be. I feel like welcome home events and personal and professional development resources are excellent avenues through which the CSC can help new scholars navigate the next steps post awards. It would also be a way to potentially meet alumni who can provide insight as well.’

‘To enable leadership in sustainable development, it is important that alumni are well aware and knowledgeable on the area and gave passion and enthusiasm to lead, hence the

importance of knowledge hubs and personal development and the creation of alumni associations to network and engage as a group.'

'The knowledge hubs seem to be a vital professional development resource but I have never heard them being advertised anywhere! The annual conference performed satisfactorily based on the geographic uptake. Mentorship is going up.'

'I feel that while the activities outlined above would assist those who are recently graduated, for many of the 'senior' scholars these may not be as useful. It would be good to think of them too and have more development resources focusing on that sector.'

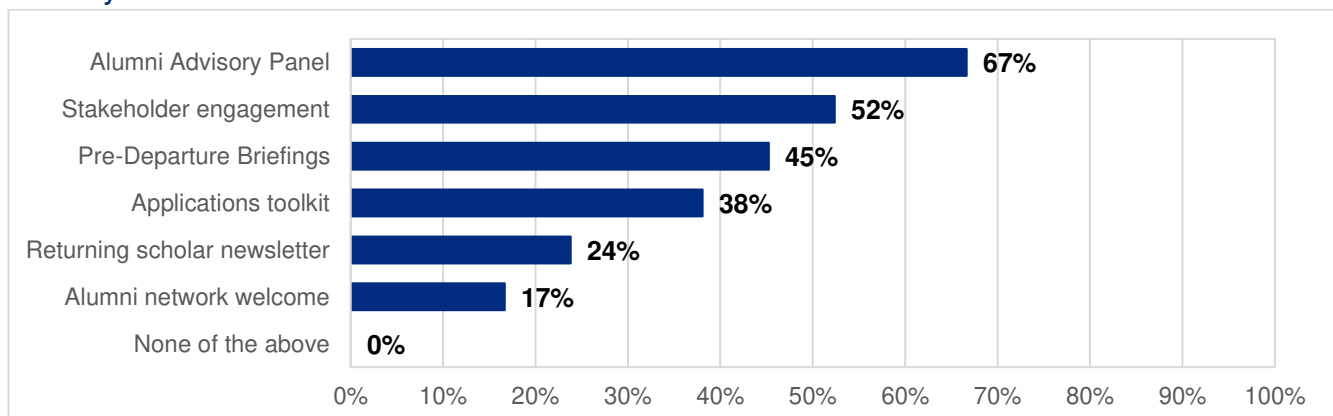
Based on open comments from respondents, the key theme between the top-rated activities was their ability to facilitate networking and expose alumni to the diversity of the CSC's scholar and alumni community.

Respondents gave positive feedback on activities which were designed to support scholars post-scholarship, such as the resources for personal and professional development, CSC Mentoring Programme, alumni associations, and welcome home events. Many cited their own experiences of navigating this period, some without the resources now available and others sharing the importance of accessing and using these.

A number of respondents stressed the importance of developing and sustaining alumni associations, with a general feeling that where they existed, they added value to the alumni experience. The annual conference, Interchange, was also popular in respondent comments. It was felt the opportunity to present on work and connect across the Commonwealth provided by the conference was an important part of the alumni experience, although greater promotion and information was needed to support this.

Objective 3: Alumni contributing to the scholarship scheme through ongoing promotion and development of programmes

Figure 7- Activities under Objective 3 which respondents feel should be prioritised for future delivery



n=42

The Alumni Advisory Panel, stakeholder engagement and Pre-Departure Briefings were the clear priorities under Objective 3. The Applications Toolkit also received positive endorsement

through the open comments. The lowest rated activities are most likely unknown to many respondents as they are focused on returning scholars/new alumni.

‘Being a current member of the Alumni Panel to me is the most direct way in which I think I am able to affect change and contribute to the programme by sharing my views and experiences.’

‘I feel alumni can and do contribute well with the pre-departure briefings by bringing in their experiences and needs that they felt could have been addressed when they went as scholars. Returning scholars newsletters are also a meaningful contribution on the part of the alumni because same as they bring their experiences to reflect in the pre-departure briefings, they can share advice and experiences and their needs when they returned after successfully completing their scholarship period in the UK.’

‘Stakeholder engagement is very important to harness the goals of the CSC. This will broaden the experiences of the alumni as they interact with other stakeholders in different sectors to impact their careers. Both the new scholars leaving their countries and the returned ones need to be well integrated and be carried along to fit in to their new roles at their new locations.’

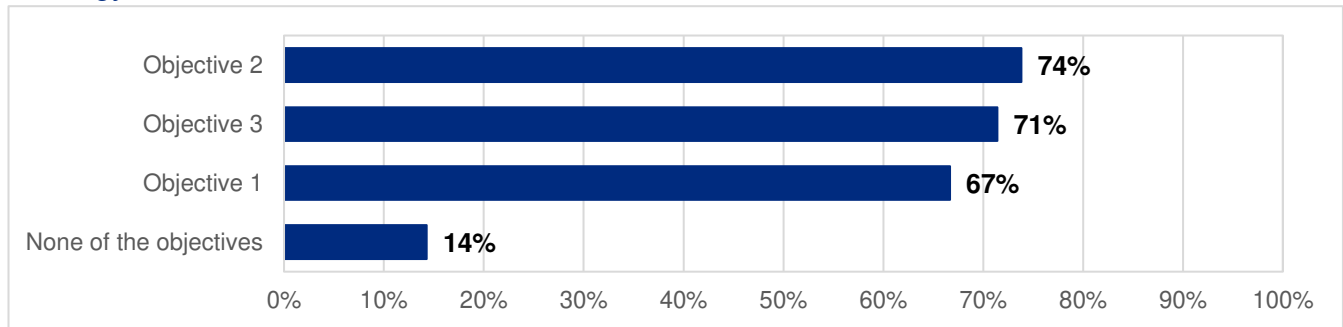
‘The Applications Toolkit is an important resource that equips alumni with the tools and information needed to promote Commonwealth Scholarships effectively. This initiative helps to sustain the scholarship program's reputation and reach, empowering alumni to act as ambassadors in their respective communities.’

The importance of stakeholder engagement was widely commented on by respondents. Stakeholders identified included the CSC, new scholars, British High Commissions, representatives of relevant external organisations, and potential applicants. The Alumni Advisory Panel was held in high regard, with some respondents sharing additional ways members could contribute to CSC activities. Pre-Departure Briefings and the Applications Toolkit were noted by many respondents as important communications tools in effectively supporting potential and new scholars to join the CSC community.

Overall, no respondents advised that any of the activities currently delivered under the strategy objectives should not be prioritised in the future strategy, showing that current activities are of value.

At the end of this section, respondents were asked to select which, if any, of the current strategy objectives should be retained and/or revised in the next Alumni Engagement Strategy.

Figure 8- Objectives which should be retained and/or revised in the next Alumni Engagement Strategy



n=42

Objectives 2 and 3 received the highest selections, although many respondents selected all 3 objectives for retainment. It was generally felt that the objectives were appropriate but that the activities should be reviewed and better articulated within the objectives, with clearer demonstration as to how they support the objective assigned.

Should new objectives be developed in the next Alumni Engagement Strategy, respondents were asked to share what outcomes or topics should be considered. Respondents did not have to provide detailed responses to this question and could share keywords instead. Keywords from responses have been collated to compile a list of the top occurring keywords and concepts.

- Equality, diversity, inclusion and belonging
- Advocacy
- Dialogues
- Impactful and sustainable changes
- Research
- Professional collaborations
- Innovation and social entrepreneurship
- Promoting cross-cultural and multi-disciplinary collaborations
- Emphasis on impact in home countries and internationally- global impact
- Local communities
- Lifelong learning
- Knowledge exchange
- Training
- Specific topics of focus cited for objectives

Understanding challenges

Findings outlined in the ‘Draft Evaluation Report on the CSC Alumni Engagement Strategy 2022-2025’ highlighted that engagement and uptake of activities by alumni in the Caribbean, Europe, North America, and the Pacific is lower than all other regions.

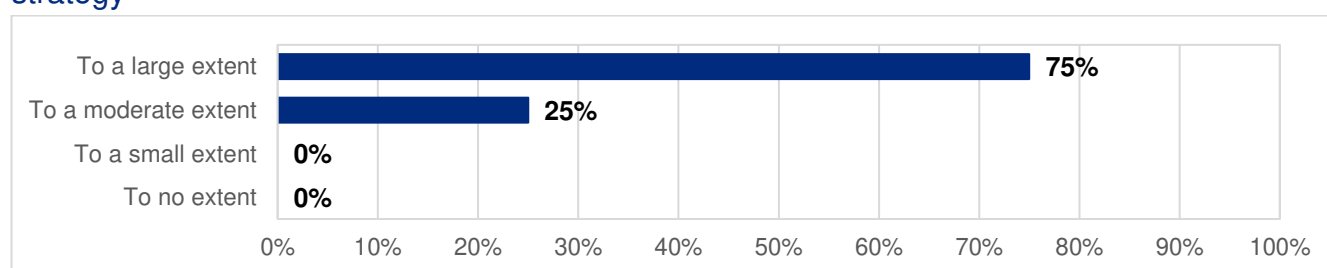
To help understand the possible challenges and/or barriers to engagement, respondents from these regions were asked to answer additional questions. 8 respondents elected to complete these questions.

In sharing their thoughts and/or personal experiences of participating in CSC alumni activities, these respondents highlighted that the timing of live online activities was restrictive, with these typically taking place in the early morning/late evening in these regions. The CSC Mentoring Programme was also noted in this context, with Mentees being based in the UK and GMT/BST time zone.

It was also felt that it was not clear what alumni from these regions could contribute to activities, with one respondent citing a cultural divide. A lack of regional and in-country alumni associations was noted by many respondents as a barrier to engagement.

One respondent noted that support from British High Commissions would be important in their region as they were well positioned to support events and leverage resources.

Figure 9- Extent to which regionally tailored or targeted activities may be beneficial to a future strategy



n=8

All respondents reported that regionally tailored or targeted activities would be beneficial to a future strategy, with most feeling this would contribute 'To a large extent'. Elaborating on their responses, it was noted that further research would be needed to identify regionally appropriate activities that would engage and convene alumni.

'If you want to make us included you have to make the effort to have events that resonate with us.'

'I like global gatherings, but perhaps it would be good to pilot an activity that is regional.'

'There seems to be a degree of untapped talent and contributions that may be capitalised upon if the Alumni Associations locally are improved and/or better resourced. Many scholars move on after their studies, with very few avenues to feed back into the CSC's activities and stronger Alumni Associations or at least some more investment therein could improve this. There may be cost effective ways of doing this which might include the involvement of the respective British High Commissions in very modest ways.'

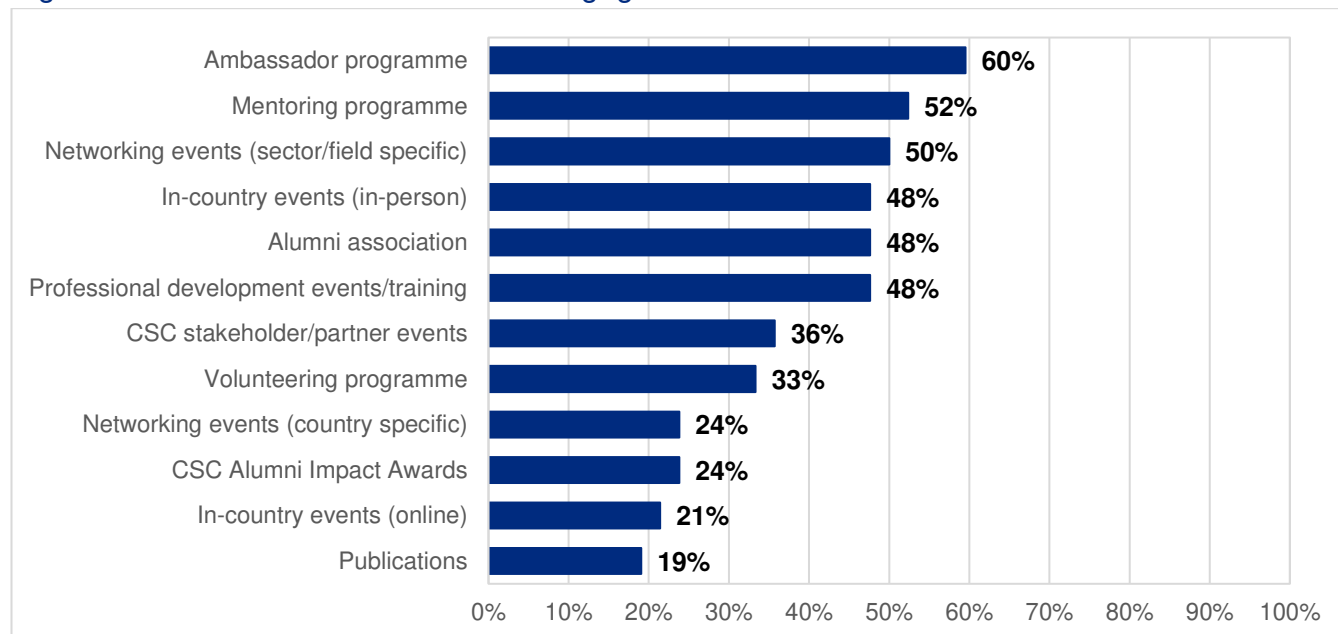
New and additional opportunities for engagement

This section of the consultation sought to understand appetite for and interest in potential new activities that could be introduced in a new strategy. Some activities, such as in-country events and alumni associations, were included as although they exist for some countries, for many

these would be new opportunities. The CSC Mentoring Programme was also included as this could be expanded to support alumni and other CSC programmes.

Respondents could select a maximum of 5 of the activities listed. Respondents were asked to share comments and expectations on the delivery of their selections.

Figure 10- Potential new activities for engagement



n=42

As outlined in Figure 10, the top scoring activities were an ambassador programme, ongoing and/or further developed mentoring programme and sector/field specific networking events.

Ambassador programme- comments and expectations

- Promote principles and values of CSC
- Support regular and informed engagement with potential applicants
- Represent the CSC at events and/or with CSC stakeholders
- Share local cultural information
- Promote CSC activities and opportunities (to those within and external to the CSC community)
- Part of a network of ambassadors
- Leverage and showcase influence and experience of Commonwealth Alumni to support the CSC

Mentoring programme- comments and expectations

- Continued delivery of the existing programme
- Additional monitoring and evaluation of the programme, and training opportunities
- Mentoring for career development
- Greater promotion of the programme
- Country-specific pairings to offer social support

Sector/field specific networking events- comments and expectations

No comments provided

‘The ambassador programme should consist of alumni whose aims are to bring awareness of CSC engagements and benefits. They should represent the CSC at different levels of the society in their countries and propose activities that will bring about sustainable development in their regions.’

‘An ambassador programme is an excellent initiative to leverage the influence and experience of alumni to promote the Commonwealth Scholarship programs and their impact. I would expect the program to provide structured opportunities for alumni to engage in outreach activities, mentor prospective scholars, and represent the CSC at various events. Additionally, providing ambassadors with adequate training and resources would be crucial to ensure they can effectively communicate the value of the CSC and its scholarships.’

‘I have participated in the CSC Mentoring Programme but could not be chosen for it the second time. I feel the current way in which this programme is run is good enough to continue this way. But the mentoring programme mentioned in the earlier list was meant for the mentoring of alumni themselves, and I feel mentoring the alumni on their career progression would be a great help.’

In-country events (in person), alumni associations and professional development events/training received a selection of 48%.

In-country events (in-person)- comments and expectations

- Ease of attendance and incentives
- Tackle feelings of isolation amongst small alumni populations
- Meaningful engagement- collaborative opportunities, opportunities to contribute, promotion of attendees as well as speakers
- Networking
- Idea sharing
- Multiple locations to maximise opportunities
- Socialise and strategise

Alumni associations- comments and expectations

- Highlight alumni contributions
- Supported to deliver community engagement activities
- Foster collaboration and build partnerships
- Support new scholars
- Funding and resources to operate

Professional development events/training- comments and expectations

- Emphasis on transferrable soft and technical skills
- Support continued career development and progression
- Writing grant proposals
- Short professional fellowship type courses
- Resource mobilisation and community engagement
- Leadership and management skills

- Training could be designed to support professional clusters of alumni
- Entrepreneurial skills development

‘In-country events are vital for fostering a sense of community among scholars, facilitating networking opportunities, and encouraging the exchange of ideas relevant to development goals. These events provide a platform to share experiences, collaborate on projects, and discuss how the skills and knowledge gained through the scholarship can be applied to address challenges in home countries. My expectation is that these events will offer practical insights, help build long-term professional relationships, and inspire actionable strategies to contribute meaningfully to national and regional development.’

‘I have never attended in person events but I would like to have in person events to be organised across various geographical locations to maximise participation and impact.’

‘This [an alumni association] could serve as a vital network for fostering collaboration, knowledge sharing, and professional development among alumni. My expectation is that it would create a platform for continuous engagement, allowing members to contribute to national development by leveraging their skills and experiences gained through the scholarship. Additionally, the association could advocate for the scholarship’s impact, support new scholars, and build partnerships with local institutions to further the Commonwealth’s educational and developmental goals.’

‘The lack of an alumni association in my country is a drawback. There was an idea to formulate one, and I was involved in the initial discussions and meetings, however this did not materialise. I strongly feel that there should be an in-country alumni association in all countries.’

‘There may be a need for a bit of resource investment on the part of the CSC, perhaps initially, to have these local associations better organised and then optimally operational, but before this is done, there is a need for the Scholars to be brought together in a more organised way locally.’

‘I believe, this [professional development opportunities] is very important because as scholars, we need our knowledge to be renewed each and every time. I think, this is very helpful to keep scholars alert and active at all times as well as understanding the new innovations and skills in the competitive markets. Once professional Development trainings are prioritised, alumni and scholars will have open opportunities to meet and interact at all times increasing the relevancy of the scheme.’

‘Continuous learning and professional development are often ignored in many countries, which freezes the alumni’s expertise and professional integrity to a certain level. There should be more online resources available for the alumni, especially for transferrable/soft skills, technical skills. CSC can also arrange for online workshops conducted by expert alumni.’

CSC stakeholder/partner events and a volunteering programme were similarly scored by respondents (36% and 33% respectively).

CSC stakeholder/partner events- comments and expectations

- Opportunities with British High Commissions
- Connections that will support and promote sustainable development work
- Collaborative opportunities to work with stakeholders
- Promoting Commonwealth universities
- Promoting the CSC's mission and values through partners and alumni networking and collaborating

Volunteering programme- comments and expectations

- Speaking opportunities
- Community focused activities
- Existing alumni activities- with volunteerism better emphasised

'CSC stakeholder and partner events offer valuable opportunities for alumni to connect with organisations and institutions that align with the CSC's mission. These events should focus on creating partnerships that can lead to collaborative projects, professional development and furthering alumni's impact in their respective fields. Specific stakeholders like British High Commissions, UK universities, and international development organisations would provide significant value by offering platforms for alumni to showcase their work and explore new opportunities.'

'A volunteering program would be a fantastic way to engage alumni in meaningful activities that contribute to community development and global challenges. My expectation would be for the program to offer a variety of volunteering opportunities, ranging from mentoring current scholars to participating in community outreach projects. Programs like the UN Volunteers or Teach For All offer great models that the CSC could learn from, particularly in how they organize and support volunteers in making a tangible impact. Integrating such structured opportunities within the CSC alumni network would enhance the sense of community and purpose among alumni.'

'Volunteering offers a very rich experience and gives you opportunity to speak and act from an informed point of view. I have had several volunteering opportunities with CSC and it has enriched my style of leadership and operation in my day to day operations e.g. volunteering as a CSC mentor opened up an avenue for creating relevant and long-term friendship across the globe and has exposed me to rich cultural awareness of other colleagues globally.'

Activities with the lowest rating, although still important to many respondents, included networking events (country specific), CSC Alumni Impact Awards, in-country events (online), and publications.

Networking events (country specific)- comments and expectations

- National goals and priorities focused
- Meet new people
- Follow-up events and activities
- Foster collaboration

CSC Alumni Impact Awards- comments and expectations

- Promote impact and achievements across multiple disciplines
- Role for alumni associations to promote, nominate and support
- Categories of awards
- Recognition at a national, regional and international level

In-country events (online)- comments and expectations

- Ease of organisation and delivery
- Emphasis on outcome focus of the event

Publications

- Access ideas from across the CSC community
- Alumni association role to promote and contribute content to support representation

‘Country-specific networking events are vital for fostering connections among alumni within the same region, allowing them to share experiences, collaborate on local initiatives, and support each other's professional growth. I have attended successful networking events where the focus was on sector-specific discussions, which facilitated meaningful exchanges and collaborations. It would be beneficial to incorporate elements like keynote speakers, panel discussions, and breakout sessions into these events to enhance their impact.’

‘The CSC Alumni Impact Awards would be an excellent initiative to recognise and celebrate the exceptional contributions of alumni to their communities and professions. I expect these awards to highlight innovative projects and leadership that align with sustainable development goals, inspiring other alumni to pursue impactful work. The awards could honour achievements and allow winners to share their stories widely. Incorporating categories that reflect diverse fields and regions and offering opportunities for winners to further their projects would enhance the relevance and prestige of the awards.’

‘Indeed, the contributions of Scholars locally can be better encouraged, supported and highlighted if there are stronger local Alumni Associations. There is a tremendous opportunity to tap into significant (and potentially willing) resources if a bit more effort is made to reconnect local Scholars with each other. In the Caribbean region, this could lead to further collaborations among the various local Alumni Associations, ultimately to the benefit of the CSC's overall objective(s) for alumnus.’

‘We learn through accessing ideas generated by others, therefore CSC publications are one way we are able to share ideas and learn from each other.’

‘While I have missed opportunities to attend face to face and online events due to time zone differences. I would like to attend some online events as this will create opportunities to connect with fellow alumni. Time zone differences while difficult to navigate, several choices should be provided for people in different time zone to attempt to fit.’

As evidenced above, respondents shared a wealth of ideas and expectations as to how proposed activities could be developed and delivered. They also suggested ways of connecting activities, such as the role alumni associations could play in awards, publications and events.

Respondents were also asked to share any activity ideas not provided in the options listed. Additional ideas included developing a role for alumni to support applicant selections, the launch of a CSC peer reviewed journal and career fairs.

Thinking about the activities they had selected, respondents were asked what personal value or return on engagement they would like to gain from participation.

Many respondents felt that valuable activities would be those that enabled them to give back, contribute to the success of others and feel they had used their skills and knowledge to make a difference. Building networks and collaborations was also important, as well as building personal and professional skills. The importance of lifelong identity with the CSC and being part of a global community was noted by many.

‘I would like the CSC to be an opportunity to change people's lives in a way where you've got the support of an organisation and community throughout the rest of your professional life - rather than just a year.’

‘I think that generally speaking it is building or honing some new skills or increasing awareness about some particular issue that would make the activity beneficial for me.’

‘I hope to build connections with like-minded individuals through the networking event. Overall, I hope to build communication, and interpersonal skills through interactions and activities during these events.’

‘I'd say the value here is the joy of service and giving back.’

‘As part of the mentorship program, the professional success of my mentees become my success story as well. That's the most important value or return on engagement that I expect. To effectively engage in professional training programs, I would expect to be taken through an online training so I can become trainer of trainers.’

‘I particularly enjoy AAP mainly because the intensity of engagement is high. I love the continuity and follow up of the programme and the final report with feedback available. I get the sense of achievement and sense of belonging. The joy of meeting new friends and other alumni across various disciplines attracts me to join for more activities. However, I really wish to meet more from my own discipline in order to collectively do something together.’

Final comments and feedback

In their final comments and feedback, respondents gave thanks for sharing the findings of the evaluation report and consultation exercise. One respondent noted the need to scale up and tailor the alumni engagement strategy, whilst another shared that recommendations in the 'Draft Evaluation Report on the CSC Alumni Engagement Strategy 2022-2025' would put the CSC in a good position to develop the next strategy.

One respondent reiterated that consideration for senior alumni would be important in developing the next strategy. One respondent noted that the impact of the Alumni Advisory Panel should be further explored.

'The alumni engagement fund should be up scaled and should be tailored towards activities that alumni associations are engaged in as this will increase chances of success.'

'The evaluation findings offer valuable insights that should guide the development of a future strategy. A key recommendation is to strengthen alumni engagement and support systems, ensuring they have continuous opportunities for professional growth and meaningful contributions. Integrating more tailored and region-specific activities could enhance the relevance and impact of the alumni network. Additionally, promoting closer partnerships with local and global stakeholders would be beneficial in leveraging resources and expanding the reach of alumni initiatives.

'It is also important to consider more inclusive and accessible ways to recognise and celebrate alumni achievements, such as through digital platforms and regional awards. The strategy should aim to create a more connected, empowered, and impactful alumni community that continues to advance the mission of the Commonwealth Scholarships, a mission that we, as alumni, play a crucial role in.'

'The findings are very encouraging and has motivated me to want to participate better in CSC activities so as to be part of the next success story.'

Summary

Overall, respondents provided comprehensive feedback and comments on the findings of the 'Draft Evaluation Report on the CSC Alumni Engagement Strategy 2022-2025' and their experience of the Alumni Engagement Strategy 2022-2025.

Insights on what was valuable about existing activities, as well as the impact on engagement due to the discrepancy of delivery of some activities, as well as limited opportunities to engage in popular activities, highlights the importance of standard and equal delivery to all alumni, where possible. There was common feedback on the importance of outcome driven activities and providing tailored activities to support this. In-country engagement and alumni associations

were in high demand, as well as activities which promote networking and the diverse global nature of the CSC's alumni community.

Lack of awareness about the full programme of activities available highlights the importance of improved communications for alumni and ongoing promotion of activities. It was also clear that activities which promoted a sense of belonging were important to alumni, as well as those where they could promote CSC values and the CSC community.

Next steps

Based on the feedback gathered, the CSC Alumni Team will:

- Review the proposed Alumni Advisory Panel Focus Group Discussion topics to ensure these address key themes and activities for development identified by respondents and begin this consultation period.
- Conduct a Focus Group Discussion and wider research with alumni from under-represented regions to develop tailored opportunities and pathways for engagement.
- Continue ongoing consultation with alumni associations on potential further resourcing and support to increase and strengthen delivery.
- Consult internally on the development of stakeholder engagement opportunities and how these could be delivered for Commonwealth Alumni.
- Review activities for retainment and potential new activities for development, with a renewed focus on building a cohesive and valuable offer for alumni.
- Draft the Alumni Engagement Strategy 2025-2028 for further panel consultation.