



COMMONWEALTH
SCHOLARSHIPS

Consultation on the CSC Community Giving Proposal

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 116 members.

The CSC's Community Giving Proposal has been developed as part of a wider piece of work exploring the potential of partnerships in diversifying the delivery of Commonwealth Scholarships.

Partnership opportunities the CSC is investigating include:

- Diversifying funding to deliver Commonwealth Scholarships through partnerships with UK Government departments and other organisations/institutions;
- Delivering prestigious opportunities for Commonwealth Scholars and Alumni through partnerships with organisations/institutions which share the CSC's vision and values; and
- Increasing alumni investment in the CSC through greater philanthropic opportunities, such as financial giving.

To explore the potential of increasing alumni philanthropy through the introduction of financial giving, members of the Alumni Advisory Panel were asked to provide feedback on the CSC's Community Giving Proposal which outlines potential ways in which this could be approached. Panel members were asked to share comments and insights on the proposal and additional ideas on ways to develop this partnership model.

Methodology

Panel members were invited to share feedback through an online survey and/or Focus Group Discussions (FGD). Panel members could participate in as many of these feedback opportunities as they wanted.

The feedback mechanisms aimed to understand initial reactions to the introduction of financial giving within the CSC's delivery, the value of such an addition to alumni, its potential impact on alumni and their relationship with the CSC, and the approaches outlined in the proposal.

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

- CSC Community Giving Proposal

The task was open to all 116 panel members. 29 completed the survey and submitted feedback. 17 panel members attended a FGD, 5 of whom also completed the feedback survey, making an overall response rate of 35%.

Results

Key findings from the survey and FGD are summarised below under the following headings: Initial thoughts and feedback; Cultural contexts and giving; Proposal development; Effective stewardship; and Final reflections.

Initial thoughts and feedback

As this marks the first time the CSC has explored alumni financial giving within its delivery, it was important to understand reactions and any immediate concerns. Survey respondents and FGD participants were asked to share their initial thoughts and reactions to the CSC Community Giving Proposal.

Overall, responses were positive, with many commenting that it was thoughtful, timely, realistic, and strategic. Respondents felt it was a good initiative and for many the introduction of a giving programme was a natural next step and one that would afford alumni an active role within the CSC not currently available.

It was felt that the proposal was well considered and offered valuable financial giving opportunities for those who could afford to participate. Respondents shared that the proposal addressed key considerations to introduce a philanthropic stream of this nature to the CSC's existing alumni engagement.

In the FGDs, all participants were excited by the opportunity financial giving would provide for alumni to more actively shape the future and delivery of Commonwealth Scholarships. This was repeatedly described by participants as building a sense of community, belonging and family.

'I think it's a reasonable proposal and well diversified in terms of ways to give. I was genuinely surprised to learn that alumni have never been asked to give before.'

'The proposal to invite Commonwealth Alumni to support the CSC through financial giving is a timely and strategic initiative. It recognises the alumni network as a valuable and motivated community that can contribute not only through mentorship and advocacy, but also philanthropy. The proposal's emphasis on voluntary giving, donor choice, transparency, and stewardship is commendable. Sensitivity to alumni economic diversity and the inclusion of a two-year post-scholarship buffer period demonstrate thoughtful planning. Allowing targeted giving to specific campaigns, such as conference grants or regional scholarships, adds personal relevance and impact. Effective storytelling, pilot campaigns, and active engagement with Alumni Associations can enhance success. Maintaining non-financial engagement pathways will also ensure inclusivity. Overall, this initiative has strong potential to deepen alumni engagement and sustain the legacy of Commonwealth Scholarships, provided it is carefully communicated and grounded in shared values of development and opportunity. I fully support this thoughtful and inclusive approach.'

'Initially, I was a little shocked thinking funding for CSC scholarships was being cut amidst the political upheaval we have seen with brewing tariff wars. On the other hand, I felt the initiative will offer alumni opportunities to give back financially and help future scholars access high quality education.'

'This is a promising and timely idea. Alumni often have a strong sense of connection to the opportunities they've benefited from, and many may be open to giving back if approached with the right message and purpose.'

Some respondents raised concerns regarding the optics of the CSC introducing alumni financial giving. Concerns included existing financial constraints alumni may be facing, including low wages and unemployment, as well as peer pressure to give to feel a part of the CSC community.

There were also initial concerns raised on the timing of the proposal, amidst UK government foreign aid funding cuts and the shrinking aid landscape, however on reading the proposal many felt assured that it was a development of the CSC's existing alumni philanthropy and wider partnerships work.

Given these concerns, respondents emphasised the importance of ensuring any financial giving communications were sensitive and clear and that funds were managed transparently. A couple of respondents also noted that exempting new alumni (those within a certain period of completing their studies) should be enforced to relieve pressure and acknowledge the difficulties alumni can encounter during this period.

Alumni as donors

Embedding a financial giving stream in a wider philanthropic approach was felt to be important to ensure that volunteering time and expertise continued to be acknowledged and valued by the

CSC within its alumni engagement. It was raised that more could be done to emphasise this in communications.

‘I believe this is a good and worthwhile opportunity for Alumni who are able to financially contribute - however, opportunities for alternative contributions should continue to be made available for all.’

‘The proposal aligns well with current trends and acknowledges the need for long-term sustainability in scholarship delivery. As a Commonwealth Alumnus who has personally benefited from the transformative impact of the scheme, I understand the motivation behind such an initiative and appreciate the emphasis on voluntary participation and maintaining the UK government’s commitment as the primary funder. However, the optics of initiating a fundraising campaign targeting alumni—many of whom came from low income or resource-constrained backgrounds—are delicate. With no financial security and limited opportunities in their home countries, it will be difficult for most of the alumni in low income countries to contribute to this initiative. The proposal does well to address this through guiding principles and by making financial giving clearly optional. Still, the success of this initiative will largely hinge on effective communication, ethical framing, and a strong demonstration of impact.’

‘I think it is a good proposal, provided it is framed with equity and empathy. Many Commonwealth Alumni—myself included—are deeply grateful for the opportunities afforded to us through CSC, and we are naturally inclined to give back. I personally benefited through a scholarship that enabled me to earn a Master’s, which has positively influenced my career and allowed me to contribute more effectively to my country. That said, many alumni in countries like mine continue to work in underfunded sectors with limited income. Asking for financial contributions must therefore be done with an understanding of this context. A tiered or voluntary giving model, perhaps based on personal capacity or years post-graduation, would be more appropriate. Additionally, highlighting how even small, regular donations can make an impact would encourage broader participation. Ultimately, it’s a good idea that should not only aim to raise funds but also strengthen the sense of collective responsibility and community among alumni. Success will depend on how inclusively and transparently it is implemented.’

Many FGD participants were keen for alumni to be engaged as both donors and active partners of the CSC. This included exploring opportunities for alumni to broker introductions to donors and/or national organisations they felt may be willing to support the CSC through partnerships, sponsorship and donations. A few participants raised utilising alumni to approach fellow alumni to give.

Matched funding was raised by several FGD participants as well as blended funding models to support the campaigns and programmes outlined in the proposal. There were concerns regarding the funding targets to achieve some of the campaigns and programmes, particularly the Regional Scholarship Fund. Identifying different models to achieve the funding target required for this campaign was therefore felt to be important.

Survey respondents were asked to identify potential opportunities that financial giving could provide to Commonwealth Alumni, Scholars and the CSC, if implemented.

The main opportunities identified by participants were:

- Ensuring the financial stability of the CSC by diversifying funding
- Supporting additional educational opportunities for Commonwealth Scholars
- Expanding the number of Commonwealth Scholarships and increasing representation
- Building a sense of community, belonging and identity amongst Commonwealth Scholars and Alumni
- Amplifying and diversifying the culture of giving within the CSC community and introducing a shared responsibility for the future of Commonwealth Scholarships amongst recipients
- Increased recognition of Commonwealth Alumni and their long-term engagement with the CSC (not just financially but as part of wider alumni philanthropy)
- Providing a more active role for Commonwealth Alumni in the delivery of Commonwealth Scholarships and work of the CSC

In addition to the above, several respondents felt that funds could be raised to support alumni engagement opportunities. This included events and networking opportunities, as well as further educational and research opportunities.

‘I think it will potentially provide increased financial stability to scholars and the CSC to allow for the continuation of existing programs and to also let CSC respond to specific needs. I think it will potentially provide alumni a way to further engage and give back. It may also increase the feeling of community.’

‘The proposed document offers an opportunity for the alumni to give back in a meaningful way, influence future scholarship programmes, and strengthen their identity as contributors to the Commonwealth development mission. The giving options allow flexibility aligned with individual capacity and motivations. The document creates potential for new funding streams that could enhance the scholars academic and professional journeys through grants, additional learning opportunities, and broader support mechanisms. The proposal also facilitates financial resilience in a changing global aid landscape, fosters stronger alumni relations, and creates room for innovation in how scholarships are delivered and expanded, particularly in underrepresented regions.’

‘This proposal offers Commonwealth Alumni a meaningful opportunity to give back and shape the future of the CSC by supporting initiatives they care about. For Commonwealth Scholars, it creates access to enhanced learning experiences, such as conference grants and leadership development, that may otherwise be unavailable. For the CSC, it opens a new, sustainable avenue for funding, strengthens alumni relationships, and reinforces its mission to support leaders driving sustainable development across the Commonwealth.’

Both survey respondents and FGD participants were asked to share ways in which introducing a financial giving stream may impact Commonwealth Alumni and their relationship with the CSC and any concerns.

FGD participants felt it would strengthen the relationship. Many commented that as recipients of a fully funded scholarship they had a responsibility to give back philanthropically as part of the CSC's wider culture of giving to support others. Some shared that financial giving was another platform to leverage the relationship between CSC and Commonwealth Alumni and encourage alumni to stay connected and engaged.

The main concerns identified by survey respondents were:

is a global issue. Many people already suffer from donor fatigue. Indeed, some scholars are likely to be recipients of requests for donations from several institutions already. Additionally, fundraising activities can be enormously expensive to launch and sustain. It is not unheard of for most of the money raised in such manner to finance little beyond the staff and resources required for fundraising itself. In this context, elaborate and persistent fundraising programs jeopardise the goodwill of potential donors.'

'One concern is that some Commonwealth Alumni may feel uncomfortable or pressured by financial giving requests, particularly those from economically disadvantaged backgrounds or early in their careers. There is also a risk that the initiative could be misinterpreted as a shift in the CSC's funding responsibility, potentially affecting alumni trust. Careful messaging and clear emphasis on the voluntary nature of giving will be essential to avoid alienating or excluding members of the alumni community.'

'My only concern is about the alumni who are not able to make any monetary contributions due to their circumstances. Maybe some of them are on a career break, unemployed, going through immigration crisis, have care responsibilities, etc. Therefore, some of the CSC alumni might not be able to make any financial contribution or participate in income generation activities and therefore would be left out of the pool of CSC scholars who are well interconnected, being recognised and awarded for their efforts. I think that non-monetary contributions should be equally recognised whether it is being a part of the advisory panel, being a CSC representative at public speaking events or in other ways.'

'The proposal might unintentionally place financial pressure on alumni, particularly those from low and middle income countries who may not yet be in a position to give. There is also a risk that it could shift perceptions of the CSC from being purely a grant-giving body to one that expects returns, which may affect how alumni engage or new applications.'

Building an equitable funding model

In both the survey responses and FGD, participants raised concerns about equity between alumni donors and between alumni donors and alumni non-donors.

FGD participants raised that career stage, personal circumstances, sector, seniority, and country of employment would influence someone's ability to give, even if they wanted to. It was therefore important that the package of philanthropic opportunities offered and delivered within the alumni engagement programme be well communicated to ensure all philanthropy was recognised and celebrated, whether financial, time, expertise, or other.

Reflecting on the Regional Scholarship Fund proposed, whilst participants were in favour of this fund, it was noted that due to the imbalance in the number of alumni across countries and regions, some regions would be better positioned to reach the financial targets required than others. This could lead to some regions continually funding scholarship recipients and others being left behind which would be demotivating for these donors.

Participants felt that the Chair would be best placed to assign funds donated to a more generalised version of this campaign, however they also agreed that donating to fund a scholar from their country rather than region was the most compelling reason to give.

It was also noted that donors would feel a level of ownership of Commonwealth Scholarships knowing that their financial contributions were influencing CSC delivery. This was a key motivator for giving amongst FGD participants, however there was concern that wealthier alumni could feel they have greater ownership and influence than others. It would therefore be important to recognise that the act of giving was equal for all donors and that reaching financial targets was a cross-donor achievement. Communicating this sensitively would be critical in the stewardship programme and main communications regarding giving.

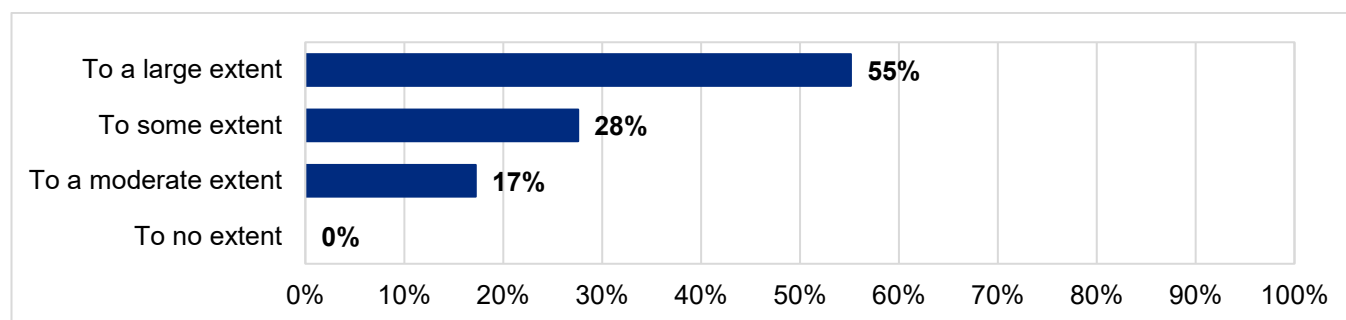
Cultural contexts and giving

Financial giving to support higher education institutions and charities is commonplace in the UK and other countries, though it remains a sensitive topic for many individuals. This section of the survey sought to understand how financial giving is viewed and experienced across Commonwealth countries and regions to ensure programmes are culturally sensitive and appropriately communicated.

Terminology

Survey respondents were asked a series of questions on the terminology used, social acceptability of giving in their country of origin and residence (where different) and the extent to which financial giving was commonplace.

Figure 1- Extent to which the term 'giving' is recognised in respondent country of origin



n=29

Most survey respondents recognised the use of the term 'giving' to refer to fundraising, however for many it had a wider cultural meaning.

'Giving' was synonymous with kindness and generosity and a term typically used to refer to community-driven social impact rather than formal fundraising programmes. Whilst the use of the term in the CSC Community Giving Proposal was understood, for some respondents, particularly those from South Asia, it was strange to see it applied solely to a fundraising programme rather than the broader sense of giving back through a range of voluntary means.

'In my country, the concept of 'giving' is recognised to a moderate extent, often rooted in cultural, religious, and social values such as charity and community support. However,

philanthropic giving is typically directed toward immediate humanitarian needs or local causes, rather than structured institutional giving like alumni donations. While the spirit of generosity is strong, the idea of financially supporting educational institutions or scholarship programmes as an alumnus is still emerging and may require greater awareness and cultural adaptation to gain traction.'

'In my country, the concept of giving is deeply rooted in the culture, especially through religious and community practices such as charitable giving and supporting education or temples. People are generally generous within their means, often giving time, money, or resources to causes they care about. However, structured financial giving to large institutions, especially in the form of regular donations or philanthropic campaigns, is less common. Giving is more often spontaneous or community-driven rather than through formal, ongoing donation programs.'

'Giving so long as it is voluntary is recognised in my country.'

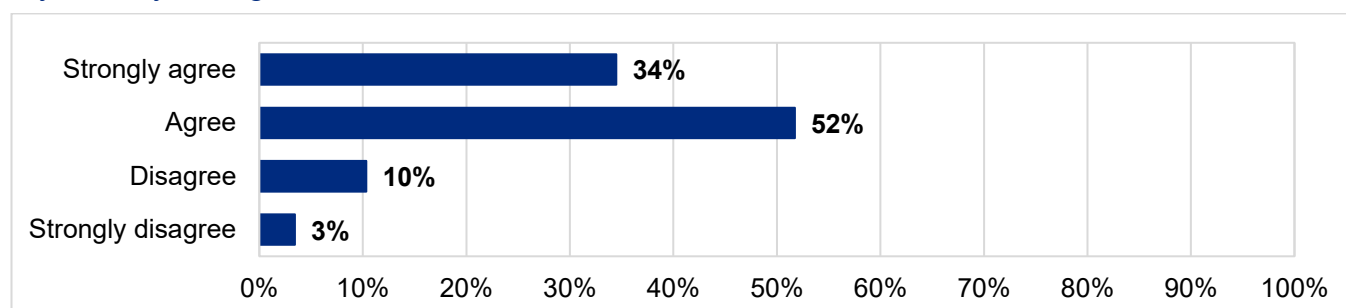
'In my country, the concept of giving is deeply rooted in cultural and community values. People regularly support one another through church contributions, community fundraising and informal social networks. While giving is often non-institutional and not always monetary, the spirit of helping others and contributing to shared goals is widely recognised and respected. This cultural foundation could be leveraged to encourage alumni giving, especially if the initiative emphasizes community impact and flexibility in how people can contribute.'

Respondents also highlighted abuses related to financial giving in their countries and that this had impacted trust in such campaigns and programmes. This may affect alumni willingness to give, as well as any wider fundraising that may be explored in-country (for example, alumni using events to raise funds for CSC).

Existing culture of giving

Survey respondents were asked to rate statements about financial giving and provide further explanation on their responses. These questions aimed to understand the existing culture of giving to higher education institution and/or education programmes in their country of origin and residence (where applicable).

Figure 2- Extent to which participants agree or disagree with the following statement: 'Financial giving to a higher education institution and/or education programmes is socially acceptable in my country of origin'



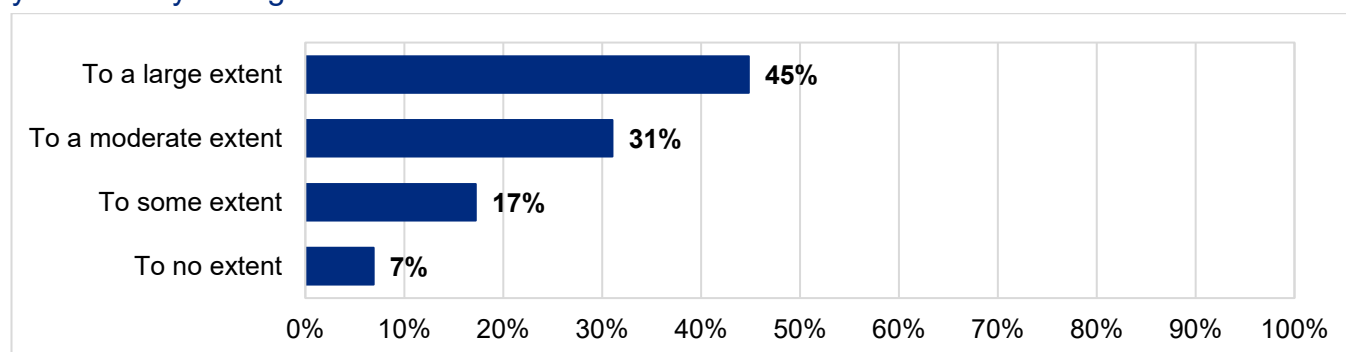
n=29

Where respondents were not resident in their country of origin, they were asked to respond to the statement above and confirm their country of residence. Responses were inline with those evidenced in Figure 2.

As outlined in Figure 2, for most respondents it was felt that financial giving to a higher education institution and/or education programme was socially acceptable. In open text responses, respondents shared that whilst acceptable, uptake was largely dependent on financial status or economic class, as well as prioritising giving to these organisations over other others requesting financial support. Supporting education was generally seen to be of significant value in respondent countries of origin and residence, with some countries more advanced in this type of financial giving and others experiencing a growing trend towards this.

There was no correlation between the countries of origin represented by respondents who selected 'Disagree' or 'Strongly disagree'. In elaborating on their rating, they explained that it was not common to be asked to give to these institutions therefore there was no benchmark for acceptability and that funding for education was regarded as a government or private sector responsibility and not something for individuals to actively fund.

Figure 3- Extent to which it would be considered commonplace to be invited to financially give in your country of origin



n=29

As evidenced in Figure 3, respondents shared they had received requests to financially give to range of different causes and organisations, whether through targeted or more general campaigns. Some respondents also had experience of being cultivated to make financial donations.

83% of survey respondents shared they had personal experience of financial giving. They were asked to provide up to three key motivations for financially giving. Responses have been grouped and are listed below.

- Opportunity to give back to community, society, organisations/institutions
- Social responsibility
- Relatability and/or importance of the cause being supported
- Financial transparency as to how funds will be used
- Ways in which financial support will help others, in particular vulnerable groups
- Long term positive impact of supporting a cause
- Religious reasons

- Recognition and legacy for the donor

Respondents were asked to elaborate on the motivations outlined.

For many, the personal experience of having benefitted from financial investment through their Commonwealth Scholarship and/or Fellowship was motivation to give back to similar causes, knowing the personal and wider impact of such an investment.

Others noted that achieving tangible outcomes through financial giving was a key motivator and supported their overall goals of contributing to positive societal change. Similarly, a couple of respondents highlighted that financial giving programmes helped raise awareness of causes, which was a motivating factor. One respondent shared that the ease and accessibility of a financial giving programme was a good general motivation to engage.

‘Knowing that even a small contribution can help someone access life-changing opportunities, attend a conference, or participate in leadership development makes the act of giving deeply meaningful. Lastly, I value transparency and impact seeing the tangible outcomes of my contribution encourages continued support and reinforces a sense of purpose in giving.’

Respondents who shared that they did not have personal experience of financially giving noted this was due to a lack of economic means to financially give and not feeling that the institution and cause were worth or really needed their financial contribution.

Proposal development

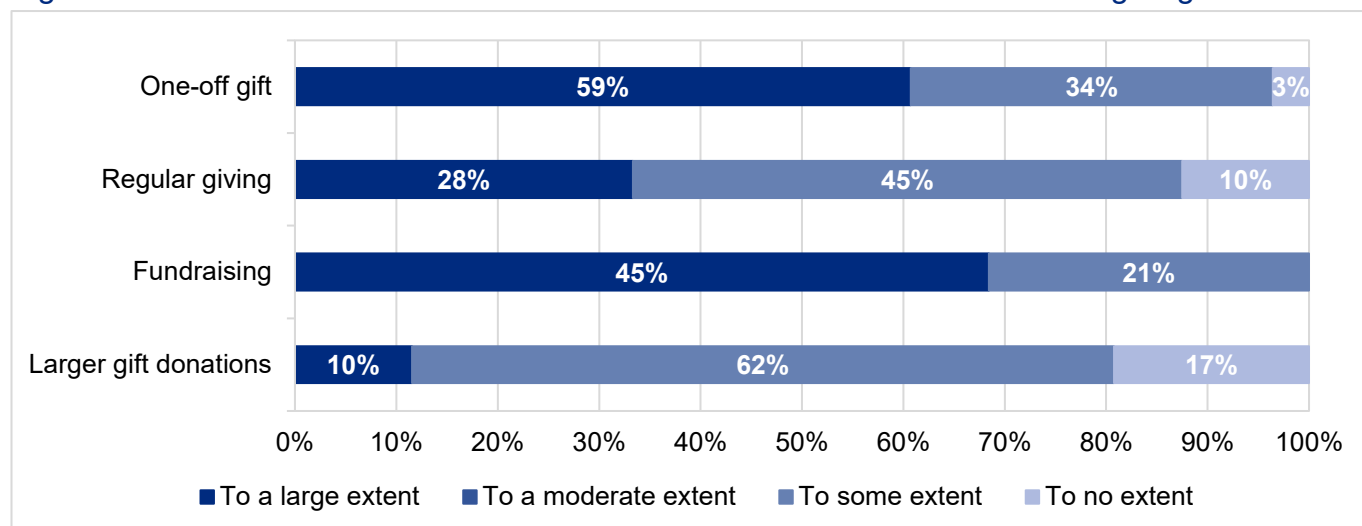
The CSC Community Giving Proposal outlined different types of giving and suggested campaigns and programmes alumni could financially support. Respondents were asked to review these and assess the extent to which they may be of interest and appealing to Commonwealth Alumni.

As evidenced in Figure 4, one-off gifts were highest rated, followed closely by fundraising, and then regular giving. Larger gifts were supported but many respondents felt these may be of lower interest.

Respondents were also asked if they felt none of the giving models outlined would be of interest- no one selected this option.

Types of giving

Figure 4- Extent to which Commonwealth Alumni would be interested in each giving model



n=29

Elaborating on their responses, one-gifts were felt to be of most interest due to the ease and flexibility of giving in this way. Knowing that multiple one-off gifts could be made also offered the opportunity for alumni to give in increasing amounts at their discretion and based on their circumstances. Some respondents felt that regular giving could feel financially burdensome, particularly if someone's financial circumstances became difficult.

Respondents generally felt that the different models provided scope for alumni to give in different ways, with the models outlined appealing to different wealth statuses, financial circumstances and existing knowledge of financial giving. Fundraising was of interest to many respondents, with some noting that fundraising provided an opportunity for alumni to contribute their time and skills to raise funds for the CSC where they personally can't or don't want to give financially.

'One off and regular giving are easier and financially accessible for many. Large gifts and fundraising opportunities require more work, although the payoff may be there if this has not been tried before.'

'Alumni are in different financial circumstances and many of them are probably bread-winners who have a lot of financial challenges. One-off gifts would probably feel much easier to give than any other form. Fundraising opportunities through Alumni Associations could be feasible and welcomed in spite of alumni work commitments.'

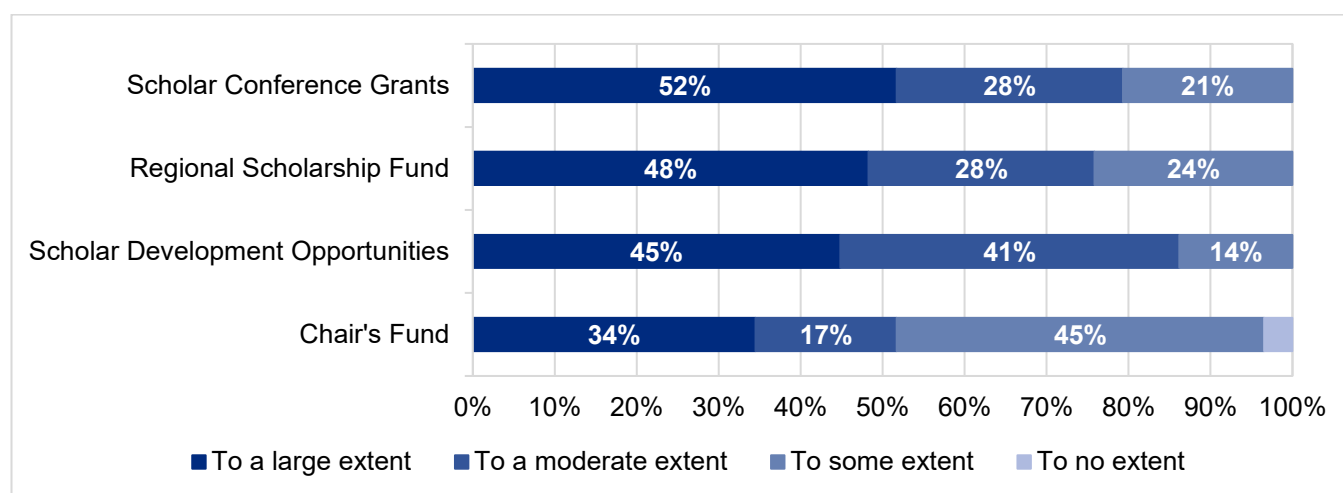
'Many Commonwealth Alumni would likely be most comfortable with making one-off gifts, as this allows flexibility based on their financial situation. Regular giving may appeal to those with more stable incomes, but economic challenges may limit consistent contributions. Fundraising opportunities could attract alumni who prefer to support the cause through community engagement or group efforts rather than direct donations. Larger gifts are less likely due to financial limitations, though a few well-established alumni may be in a position to consider such contributions.'

'The Alumni will be more interested in participating in fundraising opportunities as this doesn't require much financial resources but effort and time. The Alumni may not have adequate resources to give one-off and larger gifts but they may be willing to give regular small financial contributions quarterly, bi-annually or annually.'

Giving campaigns and programmes

Alongside the types of financial giving, the CSC Community Giving Proposal outlined potential campaigns and programmes alumni could fund. Survey respondents were asked to rate the extent to which they felt each of the campaigns and programmes outlined would be attractive to Commonwealth Alumni.

Figure 5- Extent to which proposed giving campaigns and programmes would be attractive to Commonwealth Alumni



n=29

Respondents were also asked if they felt none of the campaigns and programmes outlined would be attractive to Commonwealth Alumni- no one selected this option.

In open responses on their selections, most respondents felt the Scholar Conference Grants and Scholar Development Opportunities would be appealing. The main reason given for this was these programmes would have lower funding targets making them more achievable and therefore result in faster, tangible outcomes which would be rewarding to donors. Many respondents also felt these programmes would resonate with alumni who were not offered these opportunities whilst scholars and therefore would want to support such activities.

There was strong support for the Regional Scholarship Fund, however many noted that it would take time to achieve the funds required, potentially making this less appealing, though overall core to the CSC's work.

Generally, respondents felt that well packaged and clear campaigns supported financial transparency and would enable donors to control the use of their funds.

‘Campaigns like Scholar Conference Grants and Scholar Development Opportunities would be attractive to Commonwealth Alumni because they offer direct, visible benefits to current Scholars’ academic and leadership journeys. The Chair’s Fund and Regional Scholarship Fund are also meaningful, but since they are broader and sometimes less immediately visible, they might not generate the same emotional connection for all alumni. Overall, supporting scholar development resonates strongly with alumni who understand firsthand the impact of such opportunities.’

‘Commonwealth Alumni are likely to find Scholar Conference Grants and Development Opportunities highly attractive, as these directly support academic growth and professional networking—areas many alumni deeply value from their own experience. The Regional Scholarship Fund is also compelling, as it enables alumni to support scholars from their own regions, creating a sense of personal connection and local impact. The Chair’s Fund may be less immediately relatable or well understood by some alumni, especially in regions where governance structures are less familiar, hence the moderate appeal. Clear communication of each fund’s purpose and impact will be key to increasing engagement.’

‘The Scholar Conference Grants and the Scholar Development Opportunities are the proposed giving campaigns and programmes I consider would be most attractive to Commonwealth Alumni because of their low cost and fewer number of beneficiaries at any one time.’

In the FGDs, participants were positive about the campaigns and programmes outlined. There was a stronger sense of support for the Chair’s Fund and in trusting the Chair to make decisions on how best to allocate funding, although this was mainly in relation to raising funds for Commonwealth Scholarships. Participants were in favour of alumni having control in selecting how they wanted their donations to be used.

Additional giving campaigns and programmes

Both survey respondents and FGD participants were asked to share ideas for additional or alternative campaigns or programmes which may be attractive to Commonwealth Alumni.

Suggestions included:

- Mentorship fund to support scholar and/or alumni professional skills development and training opportunities, guided by an alumni mentor
- Research seed funding for early career researchers
- Emergency hardship fund for Scholars
- Home visit funding for Scholars
- Micro-grants for small projects for Scholars and/or alumni
- Topical/subject specific scholarships
- Scholar and alumni training workshops

In addition to the campaigns and programmes above, some survey respondents also suggested raising funds through ticketed events, the sale of CSC branded merchandise and membership fees for alumni engagement. Respondents also shared examples of existing giving campaigns

and programmes which they felt the CSC could learn from. These will be researched separately.

Some FGD participants advised exploring funding campaigns that had lower funding targets to ensure success during the initial onboarding of the giving programme. This would generate compelling stories to motivate current and new donors. One participant noted that some alumni may take a 'wait and see' approach to the programme before donating, making early successes important.

Alumni as fundraisers

As earlier reported, FGD participants were keen for alumni to be encouraged to support the giving programme as both donors and active partners of the CSC.

It was generally felt that CSC Alumni Associations could provide a mechanism to fundraise on behalf of the CSC or to support their own activities. Funds could be raised from alumni, community members or other local partners/sponsors.

Examples of activities shared by participants included:

- Ticketed events, such as annual dinners, lectures
- Selling Alumni Association branded items
- Sponsored activities

To support Alumni Associations as fundraisers, it was expected that the CSC provide training on fundraising and a raft of resources and materials. Some participants were cautious on the viability of Alumni Associations successfully fundraising due to the time, organisation and management required for this type of activity, as well as the governance and management of the funds required and stewardship of donors, particularly non-alumni.

Effective stewardship

Any giving programme requires a comprehensive and active stewardship model to thank and recognise donors, as well as keep them motivated to continue to give or increase their donations over a longer period of time. Understanding alumni expectations of such a programme is therefore vital to its sustainability and long-term success.

Both survey respondents and FGD participants were asked to share expectations of a general stewardship programme in keeping them informed of the impact of their financial gift.

Responses included:

- Annual income and expenditure reports
- Annual impact reports on the giving programme and individual campaign progress
- Regular newsletters
- Direct acknowledgement from beneficiaries, for example personalised thank you letters
- Scholar progress updates or reports on opportunities they have engaged in through the funds raised (monitoring impact in real time)
- Stories of impact

- Testimonials
- Video updates
- Website information
- CSC celebration day to acknowledge and recognise donors and donations (potentially tying to Commonwealth Day)

Regular newsletters and annual impact and expenditure reports were the most popular ways to communicate information about the impact of gifts. Respondents shared that information should be clear, visual, and include testimonials and impact stories, and videos. In addition to communications from the CSC, some respondents also cited personalised thank you letters and updates from beneficiaries to donors.

‘I would appreciate periodic reports (e.g. biannual or annual) showcasing the tangible outcomes and impact of the donations. These could include scholar case studies, testimonials, or video stories, quantitative metrics (e.g. number of Scholars funded, regional impact, diversity reached), and visual impact dashboards summarising how gifts supported specific campaigns (e.g. Conference Grants or the Regional Scholarship Fund).’

‘I feel that Commonwealth Alumni would want to be kept informed about the impact of their gifts through emphasising human stories, providing clear data, alumni engagement etc. Long-term impact created by their gifts will make them more satisfied and motivate for further donations.’

For FGD participants, key to the above is a focus on people not numbers, although financial transparency was important for participants. Participants also felt updates should be user friendly, quick to grab attention and easy to digest.

Storytelling was an important aspect of stewardship for both survey respondents and FGD participants, with stories from recipients and donors.

It was noted that those making major, principle, leadership, or transformational gifts would expect additional recognition to the above.

Suggestions for these donors included:

- Meetings with and communications from the Chair
- Meetings with and communications from the British High Commissioner in their home country/ home country Commonwealth High Commissioner in the UK
- Guest speaker and guest of honour opportunities at UK/home country/country of residence events
- News story on their gift and its intended impact where the gift made is significant to a campaign fund or the future of the CSC (optional opportunity but should be offered)

In addition to the above, FGD participants also noted opportunities to meet with the scholars supported, particularly where they are from the same country as donors.

Some participants shared that they were already donating to charities and institutions. Comparing the CSC's giving proposal to the campaigns they were already supporting, a major and positive difference was the ability for donors to fund a specific campaign and therefore receive tailored updates on the impact of their gift. This was felt to be a welcome and important unique selling point for the donor and in how their gift could be recognised.

Survey respondents were additionally asked to share the ways in which they felt Commonwealth Alumni would want to be kept informed about the management of their financial gift.

Ideas shared included:

- Availability of financial governance policy and mechanisms
- Annual expenditure report
- Impact report, including expenditure information

The most popular mode to receive this information was in a report format communicated via scheduled mailings. Transparency of the information was a key point, as well as the contextualisation of the expenditure using impact stories and updates from beneficiaries and donors. Information on new and/or proposed campaigns and programmes was also felt to be an important addition to updates in the management of financial gifts. One respondent flagged the importance of performance indicators to understand the progress of individual giving campaigns and programmes to reach their targets and to know this information was being effectively monitored.

'I would prefer a communication approach that is transparent, impact-oriented, and values their contribution as co-creators of the CSC's legacy and future. This could be achieved through regular, impact-focused communication, transparency in financial management, and recognition and inclusion such as featuring selected donors in newsletters, blogs, or videos to highlight giving as a valued act of leadership.'

Final reflections

Survey respondents were invited to share any final reflections and comments in the CSC Community Giving Proposal. Comments were supportive and encouraged the CSC to develop the proposal further, taking into consideration the feedback shared. There was overall enthusiasm for introducing a financial giving stream, with emphasis on sustaining the work of the CSC and encouraging a more active role for alumni.

'Managing a change is never easy but I think it be a good one when it's finally adopted. At the starting time it will be difficult and wrongly perceived by some people but will go a long way in sustaining the Commission.'

‘I appreciate the CSC’s efforts to involve alumni in supporting future scholars. It will be important to ensure that giving remains voluntary, transparent, and inclusive, so all alumni feel valued regardless of their financial situation.’

‘The initiative is a very good one and will afford some of us the dignity of contributing to education and development in the Commonwealth. I am confident the CSC will find a very diplomatic way to communicate the invitation for alumni to give.’

‘This proposal effectively leverages the strong bonds within the Commonwealth Alumni network, presenting a compelling avenue for members to contribute meaningfully and maintain their connection to the CSC community. By establishing clear pathways for giving back, it empowers alumni to directly support the next generation of scholars, particularly those facing disadvantages, thereby playing a vital role in the long-term sustainability of the scholarship programme. For the CSC itself, this initiative promises to deepen alumni engagement, cultivate a sense of shared ownership in its mission, and ultimately amplify the programme’s global reach and influence by showcasing the collective impact of its graduates.’

Summary

Overall, survey respondents and FGD participants were supportive of the CSC Community Giving Proposal and shared useful feedback and insights across the different elements outlined.

There was significant support for widening ways in which alumni can support and give back to the CSC, with financial giving being part of an existing culture of philanthropy within the CSC community (although this could be better communicated/presented). Respondents felt financial giving would provide a more active role for alumni to support and influence the future of Commonwealth Scholarships and that it could offer a valuable means of engagement and connection. The campaigns and programmes outlined were felt to be valuable and the range of ways to give provided different access routes for alumni based on their financial circumstances.

The biggest concerns raised were the amount of funding required to reach targets and whether this could be achieved and ensuring equity between alumni donors and between alumni donors and alumni non-donors. Sensitivity, transparency and clear communications were highlighted repeatedly, as well as a need to ensure all alumni contributions to the CSC, whether financial, time or expertise, were valued and rewarded.

Next steps

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

- Provide an update to the Commonwealth Scholarship Commission on the CSC Community Giving Proposal and panel feedback as part of a wider report on partnerships at the May 2025 meeting of Commissioners and FCDO representatives.

- Share panel feedback and findings with all teams within the CSC Secretariat to explore ways in which the proposal could be further developed, should the Commission approve this.
- Research fundraising and giving campaigns shared by respondents to further explore this area of philanthropy.
- Review ways in which existing CSC alumni engagement opportunities and programmes are framed within a broader philanthropic framework and identify ways to amplify and better present this.