



COMMONWEALTH
SCHOLARSHIPS

Reward & Recognition- Focus Group Discussion Findings

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.

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. Members of the Alumni Advisory Panel 2023-2025 were invited to provide feedback and reflections on this evaluation and the current Alumni Engagement Strategy more broadly.

Following the Panel's consultation, key areas were identified for further investigation. One area requiring further understanding was the ways in which the CSC rewards and recognises the achievements of Commonwealth Scholars and Alumni and how they volunteer their time and skills to give back to the CSC community.

To further explore these suggestions, members of the Alumni Advisory Panel were invited to a Focus Group Discussion (FGD) on the topic of 'Reward & Recognition'.

Methodology

Panel members were invited to attend a FGD on the topic of 'Reward & Recognition' and share their thoughts and insights.

As part of the consultation, a briefing was prepared on ways in which alumni are currently rewarded and recognised for their work and volunteerism on behalf of the CSC.

Results

Key findings from the FGD are summarised below.

17 alumni attended the FGD, representing 11 countries.

Feedback and responses have been collated under the following headings: Importance of reward and recognition; Exploring reward and recognition opportunities; Identity, visibility and branding.

Importance of reward and recognition

Participants were asked to share the importance of reward and recognition in the context of their relationship with the CSC and/or other organisations or membership bodies.

Participants identified the following:

- Providing encouragement to stay engaged and responsive
- Feeling of being seen and noticed by an important organisation
- Feeling valuable

Participants felt it was important to go the extra mile in rewarding and recognising Commonwealth Scholars and Alumni and that special consideration should be given to such activities.

Asked what type of reward and recognition they felt was or could be most effective for Commonwealth Scholars and Alumni, participants shared:

- Certificates
- Letters of recognition
- Merchandise
- Exclusive training and events
- Meetings with CSC Commissioners and senior stakeholders
- Profiling alumni and publishing content on the work of alumni
- Awards, such as the CSC Research Impact Awards

Some of the rewards and recognitions shared already exist in the CSC's delivery, however some were cited as requiring further development. For example, the CSC Research Impact

Awards were felt to be a worthwhile opportunity, however the eligibility criteria was restrictive and off-putting to many doctoral scholars and alumni. Alumni profiles and publications are available and form a valuable area of the CSC's work, however the lack of promotion and visibility of these did not meet the reward and recognition expectations of participants.

Exploring reward and recognition opportunities

Asked what further reward or recognition opportunities the CSC could explore, participants shared:

- Greater visibility and promotion of alumni stories, profiles and development impact
- Improved marketing and branding of Commonwealth Scholarships to add prestige to the achievements and affiliation of alumni
- Increased support to CSC Alumni Associations to boost their presence, operations and credibility
- Increased social media presence and promotion of CSC news and stories
- More formal awards, such as the CSC Research Impact Awards

Identity, visibility and branding

The visibility of the CSC was a common theme in discussions. Many participants felt it was a challenge to feeling rewarded or recognised by the CSC or as a Commonwealth Scholar.

Barriers to visibility included limited knowledge or awareness of the CSC in their home country and amongst academic and professional networks. Participants noted that the CSC is a small and close-knit community and at times can be isolating, particularly for those studying via distance learning, the only scholar at their UK university, or from a small and/or geographically spread alumni population in their home country.

Participants suggested greater investment in CSC marketing and promotion, as well as better communication of the CSC's identity and how this translates to the identity Commonwealth Scholars and Alumni.

Summary

Participants confirmed that reward and recognition was an important part of the CSC's delivery and engagement with scholars and alumni. Whilst mechanisms existed to reward and recognise, it was felt that more could be done to promote the work, impact and value of Commonwealth Scholars and Alumni. Ideas included developing greater brand visibility and identify of the CSC, more bespoke events and opportunities to meet with senior stakeholders, refreshed and expanded award opportunities, and greater support to national CSC Alumni Associations.

Next steps

Based on the feedback gathered, the CSC Secretariat will:

- Review the re-launch of the CSC's Research Impact Awards, with further consideration to the award eligibility criteria, accessibility and promotion
- Explore other award opportunities to recognise the work and development impact achieved by Commonwealth Scholars and Alumni
- Discuss brand visibility and marketing, as part of wider developments to the CSC's marketing and communications strategy
- Identify opportunities for Commonwealth Scholars and Alumni to be recognised by the CSC and senior stakeholders for their work and contributions, such as through events, awards and publications