



COMMONWEALTH
SCHOLARSHIPS

COMMONWEALTH LEADER

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Justice for all

Exploring how Commonwealth Scholars and Alumni are advancing the rule of law, human rights, and accountable governance in pursuit of a fairer world.

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The first word

This issue of *Common Knowledge* examines the complex and contested relationship between law, governance and human rights across the Commonwealth.



The rule of law is premised on the equality of all before the law: that no one is above the law and all – including individuals, institutions and government – should be equal in the eyes of the law. While precise definitions vary across jurisdictions, principles of transparency and accountability are at the heart of this important principle: law should be fair, rational, consistent, predictable, and impartial.

As the Scholars and Alumni in this issue demonstrate, progress towards Sustainable Development Goal 16, which promotes peace, justice and strong institutions, is vital if we are to promote social and economic development and create fairer and more inclusive societies.

Take, for example, the research by current Commonwealth Scholar Joana Kolo-Manma into the experience of migrants in Nigeria. In her article, Joana argues that more needs to be done to enforce the legal and regulatory framework protecting and asserting the rights of forced migrants living with disabilities, who may be vulnerable to abuse and discrimination.

In this issue, you can also read about the work of Commonwealth Alumnus Adi Talanaivini ofa ki Otako Mafi, who has been instrumental in establishing a family protection legal aid centre in Tonga that supports and advocates for victims of domestic violence.

Effective legal frameworks that protect social, economic and cultural rights, including human rights, are central to sustainable development. As Commonwealth Alumnus Michael Taylor explains in this issue, upholding land rights for Indigenous Peoples is central to ending discrimination against indigenous groups and preserving the land and ecosystems on which the health of our planet depends.

In addition, as Commonwealth Scholar Bonosree Rani argues, by realigning our sense of what constitutes human rights, we can begin to see how an environmental rule of law, that comprises benefits for people and the planet, can help secure common resources for future prosperity.

The broad scope of topics covered in this issue of *Common Knowledge* underlines the expertise of Commonwealth Scholars on questions of law, governance, and human rights. As current and future leaders in their various fields, we are immensely proud of their efforts to uphold the rule of law and promote more transparent and accountable government.

In an increasingly unstable world, it is heartening to see the central tenet of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, to leave no one behind, being carried forward by this inspiring community of change-makers.

We hope that you enjoy this issue of *Common Knowledge*. If you would like to find out more about the work of Commonwealth Scholars and Alumni, please contact us at alumni@cscuk.org.uk and we will be happy to share further examples of the impact they make in countries and communities around the world.

Dr Catherine MacKenzie
Commissioner,
Commonwealth Scholarship Commission (CSC)

Championing land rights and sustainable development



Michael Taylor
1996 Commonwealth Scholar
Botswana

PhD African Studies &
Social Anthropology
University of Edinburgh



Michael Taylor is the Director of the global secretariat of the International Land Coalition (ILC). In this article, he reflects on the challenges of securing land rights, the role of indigenous communities in conservation, and the progress made under his leadership in advocating for more inclusive and sustainable land governance.

The International Land Coalition (ILC) is a global alliance of 300 multilateral and civil society organisations based in 90 countries. Its members represent over 85 million land users across the globe, making it the largest global alliance for land rights. We come together because we believe that land rights are fundamental to four big challenges facing the world: the climate and environmental crises, the crisis of extreme inequality, broken food systems, and closing civic space.

Land rights are a particularly complex challenge. They are very political, very contested and often aligned with elite interests, economic or political, which change over time.

Shifting power in land rights

Systems change is an important aspect of the ILC's work in supporting the shifting of power and decision-making on the use of land from those with elite interests to the people who live on and use the land.



To achieve positive change in the protection of land rights, the ILC is active from the local to global level, working with both grassroots organisations and civil societies, global organisations, and governments.

Under my directorship, between 2022 and 2024, the ILC's collective effort in addressing land rights issues has achieved significant gains. This includes securing 211,255 hectares of land under the tenure of local communities, securing land rights for 2,624,311 people and influencing 25 international land rights processes to be more people-centred.

The intersection of conservation and indigenous land rights

As part of the global agreements on biodiversity, in 2022 countries signed up to protecting 30% of their landmass by 2030. That may sound like a great idea. That's good for the environment. It's good for biodiversity. It's then you start thinking, what does that mean for local people who live in these areas?

Most of the world's biodiversity that remains intact is in the territories of indigenous peoples, who have done a much better job than state parks, game reserves and forest reserves at preserving biodiversity.

There is growing recognition that this needs to be supported and promoted, rather than implementing protectionist models of conservation which seek to remove people from the land to protect and preserve it.

Over the last few years, the ILC has worked to bring land rights into the measuring of agreements that governments have made under the Convention on Biodiversity.

In 2024, at the 16th meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Biodiversity (COP16) held in Colombia, the ILC succeeded in getting an agreement that countries must report on how they've been securing the land rights of indigenous peoples. It is now an obligatory indicator that will raise the stakes of accountability on land rights, biodiversity preservation and the rights of indigenous people.

Our task now is to work through our members and 30 national land coalitions to hold governments to account and ensure they report their actions under this obligatory indicator. This will include supporting governments in measuring change in land rights and helping them make improvements.

Data will play a critical role in measuring and informing change. The ILC champions the power of citizen data to supplement official data sources where this may be missing, and we deliver training to members on ways to support citizens in this task. As well as gathering important data, this opens a space for dialogue and partnerships between governments and civil society to discuss and understand what the data is telling them about land rights and their work and actions. We find this to be a very powerful way of getting evidence to influence and change policy.



A personal journey into land rights and anthropology

I've worked on human rights and environmental issues for 30 years across Africa and the rest of the world. I grew up in a rural area of Botswana and saw from a very young age that access to land and natural resources makes a real difference to people's opportunities.

I recognised that land rights was often a fork in the road between no options and a pretty bad future, and options and possibilities that could lead to a better future. Wanting to understand the impact of land rights on people's lives and livelihoods motivated me to pursue an undergraduate degree in anthropology and later a PhD through a Commonwealth Scholarship.

My PhD sought to understand the impact of "fortress conservation" (a conservation model based on the belief that biodiversity protection is best achieved by isolating ecosystems from humans) on indigenous people who were moved from their ancestral land within the Okavango Delta so it could be transformed into a game reserve and support a growing tourism sector.

As part of my studies, I lived with the indigenous people on the edge of the game reserve, their ancestral land, to understand what this move has meant for them. For more than a generation, they had been denied access to their ancestral land but it still very much formed narratives of their identity and their relationship with their land. Applying "fortress conservation" presented a narrative that this unique and natural environment was so well preserved because it had never been spoilt by people. In doing so, this protectionist model of conservation dismissed the indigenous people's role in protecting and preserving the land and the ancient cultures and social history of the land, rather than celebrating it.

Community-led land management in Botswana

Following my PhD, I worked for the Botswana government on a programme to demonstrate how communities can manage common land to support their livelihoods and to provide evidence to inform a move away from large scale private ranches which are managed by, and profit, only a few wealthy individuals.

There were many obstacles to this work, most notably at the national level, where policy favoured a state-controlled rather than community-controlled land and natural resource management. The programme did, however, achieve successful outcomes for the communities involved. Working together to manage their common land, communities diversified livestock, set up community tourism enterprises, and implemented land rehabilitation projects.

When I got the opportunity to join the ILC after working on that programme for five years, I thought the ILC, with its global coalition, is exactly what I would have needed in Botswana to achieve positive change for land users.

Returning to Botswana for policy change

In 2026, I will finish as director of the ILC. I intend to go back to Botswana and try and do what I failed to do the first time around, to shift land rights policies and support human rights issues.

When I completed my PhD, I was the first Botswana citizen with a PhD in anthropology and the first person to argue for conversation change to protect the land rights of local communities backed up by local research and evidence. I wasn't successful at that time, but now I have the seniority and experience of having worked internationally for nearly 20 years to hold a position at a more senior and influential level of government. In 2024, Botswana elected a new government which is much more open to human rights issues and I think there's a lot of scope now in my country to re-examine some of these policy issues.

'Land rights are fundamental to tackling four big global challenges: the climate and environmental crises, extreme inequality, broken food systems, and closing civic space.'

Promoting human rights in the Pacific



Adi Talanaivini ofa ki Otako Mafi
2014 Commonwealth Scholar
Tonga
LLM Human Rights Law
Queen Mary, University of London



Adi Talanaivini (Vini) serves as a Senior Policy Advisor in the Strategic Policy team of the Ministry of Justice in New Zealand. Here, she works to ensure that justice policies consider the perspectives and lived experiences of Māori, promoting equity within the criminal justice system.

The motivation to pursue an LLM

I was motivated to pursue an LLM focusing on the rights of children as I saw first hand the gaps in Tonga's laws and policies as it related to children and their rights. In my undergraduate studies, and my work in the Ministry of Justice, I appreciated the very real dangers posed by a lack of clear rules around how children were to be treated in the criminal justice system.

In my undergraduate studies there were no human rights courses offered, but I always had a keen interest and appreciation in the role that the law played in protecting the rights of people. My late father also had a strong influence on my attraction to the law and using it to protect and uphold the rights of everyone, regardless of their circumstances. As a long-serving judicial officer, he instilled in me the values of integrity and compassion, grounded in a deep-seated passion to serve people, especially those most vulnerable.

When the opportunity came to pursue further studies, I was keen to explore programmes on the rights of children to bridge the gap in my understanding but also with a view to build skills to support government efforts in realising the rights of children.

Involvement in the Family Protection Act work

My work in human rights law began before my Commonwealth Scholarship. After my undergraduate studies, I joined the Ministry of Justice as a Legal Officer, where I was exposed to opportunities to promote and protect human rights across a range of interconnected workstreams.

In 2013, the Parliament of Tonga passed the Family Protection Act (FPA) to criminalise domestic violence. Prior to the Act, domestic violence was often treated as a criminal assault matter. The FPA marked a significant change in promoting the importance of gender equality in Tonga and underscored the need to protect vulnerable members of families, including women and children from domestic violence.

In the lead up to the commencement of the Act, different stakeholders came together to provide training support and raise awareness ahead of the Act coming into force. The Ministry of Justice was tasked with providing training to court registry staff and judicial officers and updating the case management system to include new offences and penalties. We also worked with other key stakeholders with responsibilities under the Act including police, teachers and medical practitioners.



Changing social attitudes to domestic violence was always going to be one of the biggest challenges, and Tonga was no different. As part of the Ministry's preparatory work, I was tasked with delivering training to stakeholders, as well as visiting islands and communities to conduct talks and radio awareness campaigns to ensure it was understood at the local level.

Passing the FPA was only one part of the process. During implementation, it was quickly recognised that to enforce the rights protected by the Act, survivors of domestic violence needed an affordable means of accessing justice. This was envisaged in the form of the Family Protection Legal Aid Centre (FPLAC), established through an agreement between the Pacific Community and the Government of Tonga, with donor support from the Australian and Swedish governments.

The FPLAC was designed to provide a safe space for domestic violence survivors to report abuse, seek protection and access free legal advice. I was involved in designing the scope of the FPLAC, identifying the services it would need to deliver, recruiting appropriate staff and finding a suitable location.

The FPLAC opened its doors in March 2018 and continues to support survivors of domestic violence. In its first year, the FPLAC reported a steady increase in survivors seeking assistance. This was a sad but important

outcome. It highlighted the need for protection for survivors and that Tongans were willing to speak out and seek help on domestic violence.

Beyond the Family Protection Act

Following my LLM studies, I was the recipient of a Greg Urwin Award, a joint initiative of the Australian Government-funded Pacific Leadership Program (PLP) and the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat (PIFS). This offered an immediate opportunity to apply my learning to specific circumstances in the Pacific.

I was assigned to the Pacific Community's then Regional Rights Resource Team and tasked with conducting a comparative review of legislation across Pacific Island countries which have ratified the UN CRC to understand the legal protections afforded to children who encounter the criminal justice system either as a victim, witness or in conflict with the law. The review highlighted that legal provisions were fragmented across the Pacific and more so in Tonga, where the minimum age of criminal responsibility remains far below the internationally recommended age.

This review encouraged me to continue to pursue work in protecting the rights of children and young people. In 2019, I was fortunate to be part of Tonga's delegation to the UN CRC to present its initial report and have a constructive dialogue on the rights of the child.

The opportunity to represent Tonga at such a forum on a matter I am deeply passionate about remains a career highlight.

Work beyond the shores of Tonga

Between 2020-2024, I was a Policy Advisor in two divisions of the Ministry of Justice in Wellington New Zealand. In my first division, I provided policy advice on matters relating to courts and tribunals, access to justice, and youth justice, with a key focus on applying a human rights and Māori lens to policy. I also led legislative amendments and supported Ministers throughout the parliamentary stages of the bills.

In 2022, I moved into another division within the Ministry, at that time called Ātea a Rangi (in reo Māori, this refers to a compass). It was setup to provide strategic policy advice to improve justice outcomes for Māori in the New Zealand justice system. In everyday terms, this means leading on advice and supporting other parts of the Ministry in ensuring an indigenous Māori lens is applied to the development of legislative and operational policy.

My time in Aotearoa exposed me to the inequities faced by Māori in their own land. These experiences felt far removed and different from my own experience as an indigenous person in my own home country.

My work included collaborating with Māori and community groups on how to address some of the systemic issues that impact Māori experience of the criminal justice system.

Research conducted as part of the Royal Commission of Inquiry into Abuse in Care over a 40 year period showed that at least 33% children and young people who went through the state care system, went on to serve a custodial sentence. For Māori children and young people, the percentage was 42%.

Māori are overrepresented at each stage of the criminal justice system. Despite making up less than 20% of the New Zealand population, figures in 2024 report Māori represent 37% of people proceeded against by police, 45% of convictions and 52% of the prison population. Māori experience many economic and social challenges due to an accumulation of injustices which have resulted in Māori suffering from higher levels of poverty, including low and limited access to healthcare, education and career prospects.

I feel privileged as a Tongan migrant to Aotearoa to have been entrusted with the responsibility to be a part of addressing the systemic issues that Māori face in the justice system.

The impact of my Commonwealth Scholarship

In November 2024, I took up post as a Child Protection Officer with UNICEF Pacific, supporting its child protection work in the region, with a particular focus on Tonga. My academic and work experiences have put me in good stead to continue to carry out crucial work for the realisation of rights of children.

I am grateful for the opportunity to pursue a LLM through a Commonwealth Scholarship and it is an opportunity that I do not take for granted. My LLM studies exposed me to various facets of law and enabled me to experience another country and culture. These experiences have contributed to my work and knowledge in international law and the rights of children, and in developing an important regional and global network of peers.

My studies have enabled me to mainstream human rights, children's rights and indigenous rights into policy work and apply it in public outreach and awareness programmes. By applying what I learned to the realities of the contexts in which I have been fortunate to work, I now have a broadened perspective on life. I also have a heightened appreciation of the inequities that exist around me and how I may use my skills and expertise to make some change to the status quo, no matter how insignificant it may seem to others.

‘My studies have enabled me to mainstream human rights, children’s rights and indigenous rights into policy work and apply it in public outreach and awareness programmes.’

Promoting peace and human rights in conflict-affected communities



Joana Kolo-Manma
Commonwealth Scholar
Nigeria

2021 LLM International Human rights
Laws and Development
(University of Bradford)

2022 PhD Law (University of Bradford)



Joana Kolo-Manma is a Commonwealth Scholar studying Peace, Conflict, and Development at the University of Bradford. In this article, she reflects on the impact of conflict on displaced communities, the role of education in peacebuilding, and her efforts to deliver justice, inclusion, and long-term change at local, national, and international levels.

Supporting those affected by conflict

According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), at the end of 2020, about 78 million people had been forcibly displaced both within and outside countries. Conflict, violence and natural disasters are some of the key factors contributing to the rising number of internally displaced persons (IDPs), leading to forced migration.

My work and studies advocate for the legal protection of people who have been displaced and destabilised by conflict – those who have lost their homes, livelihoods, and sense of security. My current research aims to identify the risk factors for forced migration, with a particular focus on examining the framework for the protection and enforcement of rights of migrants living with disabilities in Nigeria.

Advocating for rights-based solutions for displaced communities

As a qualified barrister and solicitor of the Supreme Court of Nigeria, I advocate for inclusive development and access to justice. My work is important because it fills the gap between legal theory and lived reality, especially for society's most marginalised groups.

Nigeria currently lacks a legal framework to protect IDPs, making them vulnerable to human rights abuses within IDP camps and host communities. IDPs with disabilities experience additional challenges as their needs are often not considered in the design and management of IDP camps, such as access to education and engagement in daily activities.

My study aims to develop a service model that ensures the enforcement of basic human rights for IDPs with disabilities. This includes exploring the role of technology in facilitating their access to basic amenities. I want to see



camps that provide for the specific needs of people with disabilities: mobility aids, Braille materials, and tools for hearing support.

During my PhD fieldwork, I have engaged directly with IDP camp leaders and NGOs already operating in the space to understand the barriers and challenges to service delivery and ways of addressing this. These partnerships are crucial to the success of my research and its application to real world settings.

Findings from my fieldwork will ensure my research provides a needs-based response to the challenges faced by displaced communities and that they have the resources and opportunities to rebuild their lives. My focus has always been on advocating for practical solutions, rather than just theoretical discussions.

Building legal pathways to justice and empowerment
In 2020, I founded the Springs Legal Consult to provide legal services to poor people, as well as organisations. This has included delivering prison outreach initiatives, working with law firms to provide legal assistance to detainees who cannot afford representation.

Following my PhD, I hope to broaden the scope of the Consult to advocate for the legal rights and protections of IDPs and those who are disabled. This will include building on the connections I have made through my research with UK-based NGOs and legal professionals, as well as government institutions in Nigeria.

Beyond policy advocacy, I also plan to teach, sharing my knowledge and passion for human rights with future generations. Teaching is not just a career goal for me, it is a calling. I have taught A-level law in Nigeria and have gained further pedagogical training and teaching experience at the University of Bradford where I now tutor second and third-year students on the intersection between law and social justice.

One of the most transformative parts of studying in the UK has been access to academic and institutional resources. At the University of Bradford, I've benefited from a wealth of research materials, online journals, and a structured academic calendar that allows me to plan and deliver my work efficiently.

Alongside academic tools, I have had access to leadership and development programmes which have helped me to build skills in communication, crisis management, and negotiation. These are essential not just for academic success, but for my work in the field.

A future dedicated to justice, peace, and inclusion

I'm committed to continuing my work to positively change the lives of IDPs and IDPs with disabilities, both in Nigeria and internationally.

I am not just a legal practitioner – I am an advocate, an educator and a strategist. My goal is to position myself where I can influence policy, shape curriculum, and support communities in tangible ways.

Studying in the UK and being part of the Commonwealth Scholar community has reinforced this vision. With the knowledge and experience I have gained, I am determined to play a role in creating a more just and peaceful society – one where the voices of the most vulnerable are not just heard but acted upon.

'My work is important because it fills the gap between legal theory and lived reality, especially for society's most marginalised groups.'

Sustainable space exploration: environmental justice



Bonosree Rani
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2024 Commonwealth Scholar
Bangladesh
LLM Law, Development and
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PhD Law, SOAS, University of London



Bonosree Rani is a Commonwealth Scholar and PhD researcher at SOAS, University of London, exploring the environmental impact of space exploration and the legal frameworks needed for sustainable governance.

With the rapid rise of satellites and space debris, Bonosree's research applies environmental justice principles to ensure equitable access to space resources, accountability among space actors (those using or accessing this resource), and protection of outer space as a global commons.

By 2030, there could be more than 60,000 active satellites in space. Alongside active satellites, there are millions of pieces of 'space junk' comprised of satellites and other space debris from failed and inactive projects. Over the last eight years, there has been an increase in the number of satellites launched into space, not just by governments, but also private companies.

Space exploration poses a new challenge to environmental law which has not yet been greatly considered. My PhD research explores the impact of space exploration on the environment, both in outer space and on Earth, and the laws required to manage and ensure sustainable and environmentally conscious space exploration.

Understanding the global commons

During my Master's at SOAS, I was introduced to the law of global commons, which identifies four shared global resources which are not governed by any nation but should be protected and safeguarded by all. These are: the high seas, the atmosphere, Antarctica, and outer space.

My studies deepened my knowledge of space exploration and the extent to which society is increasingly dependent on space resources for everyday activities, such as GPS tracking. As a global common, however, outer space is not legally protected to ensure sustainable governance of this resource from space actors. This motivated me to continue my research through my PhD.

Applying environmental justice principles to space law

My research focuses on the environmental impacts of space activities and the application of environmental justice principles – distributive, procedural and recognition justice – and development of a participatory framework to outer space governance.

'If I want to ensure the sustainability of the space resources or the environment of the space, we have to ensure the accountability of the whole space actors.'

Under distributive justice, my research project will argue for the fair and global distribution of the benefits of space exploration, for example sharing atmospheric and climate data collected through GPS satellites to support all countries to mitigate the impacts of climate change. Procedural justice highlights the need for space actors to meet robust environmental impact assessment protocols and to support a transparent decision-making process on which new satellites should be sent into space based on their purpose and potential environmental impact. This would introduce accountability among space actors. Lastly, recognition justice underscores the need to acknowledge the intrinsic value of celestial environments and the rights of future generations to inherit a sustainable space environment.

Bridging the global divide in space exploration

These justice principles are particularly important for non-spacefaring states and indigenous communities, whose voices are often excluded from space policy discussions. My research has identified a gap in space exploration between nations in the Global North and those in the Global South.

Typically, nations situated in the Global North have greater financial and technical resources to develop space exploration, with little collaboration with nations in the Global South. To achieve distributive justice, we need to ensure that all nations work together to explore the resources of space and their benefits. Implementing an international participatory framework through a multinational organisation, such as the United Nations, could support this aim and ensure good, transparent and mutual governance of outer space.

The environmental costs of space exploration

Alongside benefits, space exploration also introduces environmental concerns. In December 2024, a half-ton piece of space junk landed in a small village in Kenya. In 2023, villagers in Uganda reported debris landing over a 40-kilometre-wide area. Exploration in outer space poses threats to inner space (space at or near the Earth's surface) and the Earth's environment.

Environmental harm caused by space exploration does not have any borders. My research will utilise data gathered by the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) to explore the environmental threats of space exploration and scrutinise the extent to which existing international and environmental laws adequately protect these global commons.

Through this research, I intend to identify governance solutions and ensure the sustainable governance of space resources, which would lead to the sustainability of the whole environment. My early research indicates this could be achieved by amending and updating the Common Heritage of Humanity, a principle of international law that holds that elements of humanity's common heritage, cultural and natural, should be held in trust for future generations.

Advocating for a sustainable future in space governance

We need to recognise that space exploration is an opportunity and concern for all nations and must be managed in a sustainable way. A key aim of my PhD project is to bring a unanimity of all states on outer space governance through integrating environmental justice principles.

My research will call for a holistic approach that addresses the environmental impacts of space activities whilst ensuring that the benefits of space exploration are shared equitably among all nations and future generations. I hope my findings will also deepen the urgency of taking appropriate actions by international policy makers. As a researcher from the Global South, my PhD and Commonwealth Scholarship is also providing an opportunity to build my research networks, engage in policy networks and ensure that the voices and needs of nations not typically engaged in space exploration are represented.

‘Through sustainable space exploration, states can improve their citizens’ health care, protect our planet and environment, make scientific discoveries and create technical jobs.’

Celebrating 65 years of Commonwealth Scholarships

On 20 November, the CSC held its 65th Anniversary Impact Showcase Reception at Lancaster House in London. The event highlighted the achievements of Scholars and Alumni over the past six and a half decades and celebrated the legacy of the CSC since the first Commonwealth Scholarships were awarded in 1960.

We were delighted to host more than 200 distinguished guests, including UK parliamentarians, Commonwealth High Commissioners, and vice-chancellors and senior leaders from universities across the UK.

Through an exhibition of research by current PhD Scholars and testimonials from recent Alumni, the event provided a snapshot of the impact that Scholars and Alumni make in their careers as researchers, leaders, and development practitioners. It also spotlighted inspirational stories from the Commonwealth Scholarship network through the 65th anniversary timeline display, demonstrating the shared values that unite this global community.

A legacy of impact

We were honoured to welcome The Rt Hon Anneliese Dodds MP, former Minister for Development at the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO), and Dr Terri-Ann Gilbert-Roberts, Research Manager at the Commonwealth Secretariat, as keynote speakers at the event.

In her address, Anneliese Dodds outlined the UK government's vision for strengthening relationships with partners in the Commonwealth to boost economic growth, tackle common challenges, and create opportunities for future generations.

Meanwhile, Dr Gilbert-Roberts talked about how the lessons from her UK study experience have influenced her career, including the ways in which research can be a tool for development activism.

We were also delighted to present a video message from The Rt Hon David Lammy MP, Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs. The Secretary of State spoke about the unique power of education in unlocking opportunities and delivering a brighter future for young people across the Commonwealth.

‘Every day, and in every place, alumni continue to work towards Commonwealth values and help to build more resilient societies.’

Dr Terri-Ann Gilbert-Roberts





Visiting Scholars and universities nationwide

Each year the CSC Programmes Team plans a number of visits to our university partners across the UK. These site visits have a range of purposes including meeting Scholars, encouraging Scholar networking, building on our longstanding relationships and forging new links with our university contacts, including CSC advisors and supervisors.



Since October 2024 we have been pleased to lead 15 site visits, and meet over 180 Scholars, and hope to meet many more over the rest of this year!

The map opposite highlights our visits across this year, including joint visits where Scholars from nearby institutions are invited to join an event taking place in the region.



Each visit provides an opportunity to hear directly from Commonwealth Scholars about their time in the UK – how they're settling in, progressing with their studies, and engaging with academic life. A number of PhD Scholars have delivered insightful presentations on their research, often offering invaluable advice and encouragement to newer Scholars. Alongside these sessions, we run interactive activities designed to help Scholars connect with others in their region, build supportive peer networks, and feel part of a wider community. Regional Network Coordinators are also invited to take part and share their experiences.

For us, these visits are also a chance to deepen relationships with our university partners. They allow us to share updates on CSC's programmes, demonstrate their impact, and explore opportunities for further collaboration. Strengthening these links is key to ensuring Scholars receive a high-quality, well-supported experience throughout their time in the UK.



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|---|--|---|
| 1. University of York | 7. University of Cambridge | 13. University of Bath |
| 2. University of Hull
(joint with York) | 8. University of Birmingham | 14. University of St Andrews |
| 3. Brunel University | 9. University of Bristol | 15. University of Aberdeen |
| 4. University of Southampton | 10. School of Oriental and African
Studies (London) | 16. Cardiff University |
| 5. Bournemouth University
(joint with Southampton) | 11. University of Nottingham | 17. University of Kent |
| 6. University of Oxford | 12. Bath Spa University
(joint with University of Bath) | 18. University of Sussex |
| | | 19. Central London (joint event for
central London universities) |

Alumni news

The updates below (listed by year of award) summarise just some of the achievements of our global alumni. To let us know about your successes, email alumni@cscuk.org.uk

1978

Vickie Baracos has been appointed to the Order of Canada in recognition of her research of cachexia, a debilitating syndrome that causes rapid weight and muscle loss in patients with advanced-stage cancer. A professor at the University of Alberta, she developed groundbreaking insights into the fundamental biology of this complex condition, which has led to clinical classification and diagnosis, and the development of treatment resulting in improved patient outcomes. (Scholar from Canada, PhD Applied Biochemistry and Nutrition, University of Nottingham)

1991

Mark Carney was elected leader of the Liberal Party of Canada and on 14 March 2025 was sworn in as the 24th Prime Minister of Canada. In April, he steered the Liberal Party to a fourth successive general election victory. He previously served as the governor of the Bank of Canada from 2008 to 2013 and the governor of the Bank of England from 2013 to 2020. He was the UN Special Envoy on Climate Action and Finance from 2020-2025. (Scholar from Canada, DPhil Economics, University of Oxford)



Ndukwe James Okeudo has been appointed the 9th Vice-Chancellor of Abia State University Uturu. Prior to this appointment, he was Professor of Animal Science at the Federal University of Technology, Owerri. (Scholar from Nigeria, PhD Meat Science, University of Belfast)

1992

Niaz Ahmed Khan has been appointed Vice-Chancellor of Dhaka University. He has previously served as Pro-Vice Chancellor of the Independent University, Bangladesh, Country Representative for Bangladesh at the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) and Senior Program Coordinator for the Chittagong Hill Tracts Development



Facility (CHTDF) at the United Nations Development Program (UNDP). (Scholar from Bangladesh, PhD Development Studies, Swansea University; 2008 Academic Fellow, Public Policy Discourse (Forest Policy), University of Oxford)

2002

Sayema Haque Bidisha has been appointed Pro Vice-Chancellor of Dhaka University. She has expertise in labour and development economics and gender and women's empowerment and has supported the Government of Bangladesh on various policy documents. (Scholar from Bangladesh, MSc Development Economics, University of Bath)

2006

Halimah Amirah Faridah DeShong has been appointed University Director of the Institute for Gender and Development Studies at the University of the West Indies. She is an experienced feminist researcher in the areas of gendered and gender-based violence, feminist methodologies, anti-colonial feminisms, qualitative interviewing and analysis. She is committed to addressing enduring inequalities in the Caribbean through her teaching and research engagement with communities. (Scholar from Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, PhD Sociology of Gender & Violence, University of Manchester)

2008

Resa Noel-McBarnett has been appointed by the University of the West Indies Global Campus as Head of Site, St Vincent and the Grenadines. This appointment is the continuation of a distinguished career in the public sector that includes various roles such as Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Tourism, Civil Aviation, Sustainable Development and Culture, and Education Officer in the Ministry of Education. (Shared Scholar from Saint Vincent and The Grenadines, MPhil Children's Literature, University of Cambridge)



2016

Kamil Majeed has been awarded the GESS Education Award in Positive Change in Education. The awards highlight and reward the quality and diversity of educational products, resources, services and people. As the Executive Principal and CEO of the Nordic International School Lahore, the award recognises Kamil's significant contributions to education. (Shared Scholar from Pakistan, MA Education and International Development, University College London)

2019

Bovinille Anye Cho has been awarded the Royal Society Career Development Fellowship. He is one of eight outstanding researchers selected for the scheme for his research on the creation of more environmentally sustainable bioenergy processes. (Scholar from Cameroon, PhD Process Integration, University of Manchester)



Obituaries

1960

Harold Luntz was a legal Scholar renowned for shaping Australia's torts law. He was a professor at the University of Melbourne's Law school and Dean of the Faculty of Law between 1986-1988. He developed the motor accident scheme in Victoria, the most advance accident scheme in Australia. He was appointed an Officer of the Order of Australia for his 'distinguished service to legal education, as an academic and editor, to professional development, and to the community'. He passed away on 29 January 2025. (Scholar from South Africa, BCL Law, University of Oxford)

1961

Edgar D R Honderich was a philosopher, professor and author of many books on consciousness, determinism, Philosophy of Mind and Ethics. He was chairman of the Royal Institute of Philosophy and an honorary association of the National Secular Society. He passed away on 12 October 2024. (Scholar from Canada, PhD Philosophy, University College London)

1966

Dr Alastair Niven OBE LVO FRSL served as Director General of the Africa Centre and held a Fellowship at the Institute of Commonwealth Studies in London. He spent over two years as the Secretary General's Assistant at the Association of Commonwealth Universities and was Director of Literature at the Arts Council of Great Britain, Arts Council England, and the British Council. He was also formerly Principal of the educational charity Cumberland Lodge.

Alastair led a distinguished career which is reflected in his lifelong commitment to international education, cultural dialogue and the values of the Commonwealth.

He was a steadfast supporter of the Commonwealth Scholarship and Fellowship Plan (CSFP). As Chair of the CSFP Support Group and a long-time ally of the CSC, he played a pivotal role in shaping the Commonwealth Scholar experience. He was also instrumental in creating the annual Parliamentary event for Scholars – a chance for Commonwealth Scholars to connect with their peers and learn about the workings of the UK Parliament from MPs and other experts.

Alastair will be remembered with respect and affection by friends, colleagues, and the many Scholars whose work he supported and inspired. He passed away on 26 March 2025. (Scholar from the UK to Ghana)

1965

Hindpal Singh Jabbal was the founding chairman of the Energy Regulatory Commission. Starting as a junior engineer, he dedicated his life to public service, working as a technical advisor for the Ministry of Energy before being appointed as founding chairman of ERC. His contribution to the Kenyan power sector earned him the Sikh Lifetime Achievement Award in 2018 and the appellation of 'father of electricity'. (Scholar from Kenya, MSc Power Systems Engineering, University of Manchester)

1970

Kenneth Robert Battle was founder and president of the Caledon Institute of Social Policy. In this role he contributed to the development of the Canadian National Child Benefit Program. He dedicated his career to social justice, serving as the director of the National Council of Welfare. In 2000, he received the honour of Member of the Order of Canada. He passed away on 18 November 2024. (Scholar from Canada, BPhil Sociology, University of Oxford)



Scholar events

(September 2024 – March 2025)

Wales and NI region

Commonwealth Scholars in the Wales region had their first meet and greet at Cardiff University at the end of October. The meet and greet was a way for Scholars to get to know each other and connect for the first time while discussing future events for the region.

The Regional Network Coordinator for Wales and Northern Ireland helped Scholars to participate in an exhibition for researchers to showcase science for 1500+ school children and their teachers at Aberystwyth University during the Science week from 11-13 March.



London

Commonwealth Scholars in London had the opportunity to attend several events organised by the Regional Network Coordinator. They had their first meet and greet in October followed by a webinar on global digital governance in December which was delivered by Dr Archana Gulati. 30 Scholars visited the Sky Garden in London on 31 January fostering interdisciplinary collaboration and cultural exchange.

South East

Commonwealth Scholars from the South East region took a trip to the Winter Wonderland in December as part of their meet and greet. The festive December atmosphere was an ideal setting for fostering meaningful connections and building lasting networks.

West Scotland

Commonwealth Scholars in the West Scotland region had the opportunity to attend a meet and greet with a sightseeing tour on 11 January. Scholars networked while enjoying Glasgow's key landmarks.





Connect and Collaborate 2025

On Thursday 13 February the CSC held its annual Connect and Collaborate event at the Queen Elizabeth II Centre in London. The event brought together Commonwealth Scholars studying at universities across the UK for a day of discussion and networking centred on development impact. This year, we welcomed notable alumni Dr Lin Cherurbai Sambili-Gicheha (The Commonwealth Secretariat, 2016 Commonwealth Scholar from Kenya) and Professor Tim Soutphommasane (University of Oxford, 2004 Commonwealth Scholar from Australia) as keynote speakers. We were also delighted to welcome Lord Collins of Highbury, Deputy Leader of the House of Lords and Parliamentary Under Secretary of State (Africa), as a guest speaker from our sponsor department, the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO).

Following on from Professor Mason, Lord Collins commended Scholars' dedication and hard work, and congratulated them on receiving a Commonwealth Scholarship from among the thousands of people who applied each year. Responding to the energy in the room, Lord Collins urged Scholars to be bold and lead from the front in bringing positive change to their countries and communities.

The power of sport

The event was hosted by the CSC Chair, Professor Robin Mason ORB, who celebrated Scholars' commitment to making a difference in the world and enriching UK higher

education. Professor Mason thanked everyone involved in supporting the CSC's work, from the nominating agencies that select candidates to the Commissioners who review applications and the UK universities which host Commonwealth Scholars. Professor Mason also gave special thanks to the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office which sponsors the CSC's work and support in numerous areas.

Next, Dr Lin Cherurbai Sambili-Gicheha, Advisor in Sport for Development and Peace (SDP) at The Commonwealth Secretariat, delivered the morning keynote address on the role that sport can play in creating peaceful and cohesive societies. Dr Sambili-Gicheha spoke candidly about the challenges of her role, working with disaffected young people in environments where terrorist and criminal organisations operate, and the rewards of seeing people's live flourish through access to sport. Dr Sambili-Gicheha encouraged Scholars to seek out new challenges and draw on the Commonwealth network to achieve their goals.

Celebrating Scholars' achievements

The event ended with a vote of thanks by Remi Olusoga (Commonwealth Master's Scholar from Nigeria studying at the University of Sussex), before a reception for Scholars and invited guests.

The CSC was very pleased to welcome special guests from the FCDO, Commonwealth High Commissions, and UK universities to this year's event.



Alumni events

(September 2024 – April 2025)

In-country events

Bangladesh

On 7 December, the Bangladesh Association of Commonwealth Scholars and Fellows (BACSAF) marked the 65th anniversary of Commonwealth Scholarships. The summit highlighted the valuable contributions of Commonwealth Scholars and Fellows to national development and offered a platform for alumni to strengthen networks, collaborate, share expertise, and promote BACSAF's advocacy for future scholarships and professional development.

Canada

On 6 November, the Canadian Association of Commonwealth Scholars and Fellows (CACSF) hosted a CSC 65th Anniversary Reception at the British High Commission in Ottawa.

The event celebrated the role of Commonwealth Scholarships in transforming lives across generations. Acknowledging that the event took place the day after the 2024 US general election, the event comprised an expert panel discussion on the topic, 'How will yesterday's US election effect Canada and the UK?.'

Ghana

On 7 November, Commonwealth Alumni in Ghana participated in a panel discussion on the accessibility of eye healthcare in Ghana. Comprised of an expert panel, the event sought to stress the importance of eye healthcare and the critical need for community and religious leaders to mobilise and promote eye healthcare and combat superstitious beliefs and misinformation.

On 13 December, the Commonwealth Scholars & Fellows Alumni, Ghana (CoSFAG) delivered an event to celebrate 65 years of development impact through Commonwealth Scholarships. The event brought together alumni to network and reflect on their development impact contributions at the local, national and international level and to rekindle the alumni association.

Malaysia

On 3 December, Commonwealth Alumni in Malaysia gathered for a special event to celebrate the 65th anniversary of the CSC. The event marked the first time since the COVID-19 pandemic that alumni had met in-person. The central theme of the event was 'planetary health' and alumni engaged in a range of discussions to explore the ways in which they could contribute to this in their work and personal lives.

Nigeria

On 3 October 2024, Commonwealth Alumni in Nigeria convened to showcase and spotlight development impact through entrepreneurship and business innovation, as part of their celebrations to mark 65 years of Commonwealth Scholarships.

On 14 and 15 October, the Commonwealth Scholars and Fellows Alumni Association Nigeria (COSFAN) held their first international conference on the theme, 'Reimagining an inclusive society through governance, technology and social justice'. The event brought together participants from a range of sectors, including academia, industry and civil society, alongside Commonwealth Alumni and students from the University of Ibadan.

Solomon Islands

On 1 November, the Solomon Islands Commonwealth Scholars Alumni Association (SICSAA) held an event to celebrate the 65th anniversary of the CSC. Alongside celebrating the work and impact of Commonwealth Scholars and Alumni over the CSC's 65-year history, the event provided an important and timely platform to raise awareness of new scholarship initiatives available to Solomon Islanders and citizens of Small Island Developing States (SIDS).

Tanzania

On 15 November, Commonwealth Alumni in Tanzania facilitated a webinar on enterprise and entrepreneurship for young budding entrepreneurs and Commonwealth Alumni. The webinar highlighted what it means to be an entrepreneur and the importance of nurturing an entrepreneurial mindset to achieve success.

Zambia

On 6 December, the Commonwealth Alumni Association of Zambia (CAAZ) delivered a panel discussion on, 'Measuring the dimensions of the window of opportunity'. The event sought to address key aspects related to access, inclusion and opportunity, with a focus on the application of this in the context of education, entrepreneurship, workplace practices, and community participation.

Development in Action webinar series

October 2024

How do we ensure that girls meaningfully gain from investments in Education?

Commonwealth Alumnus Sylvia Ichumar highlighted the critical need for intentional and sustained efforts to embed social inclusion in policy and practice by sharing her experience working with local and international stakeholders.



November 2024

Climate change challenges for Pacific Small Island Developing States

Commonwealth Alumnus Mahendra Kumar discussed the need for Pacific Small Island Developing States (SIDS) to prioritise climate change as the number one development and security issue for the region. He shared strategies adopted by Pacific countries to tackle the climate threat, and the challenges they face in their collective quest to save their homelands.



December 2024

From Indian Navy to international trade: Commonwealth Scholarships enabling career transitions

Commonwealth Alumnus Lt Cdr Bidisha Pandey (Retd) shared her motivation to expand her career beyond defence and the Indian Navy, inspired by a broader desire to contribute to economic and social prosperity and the role of her Commonwealth Scholarship in facilitating this pivot.



January 2025

Mobilising private investments for climate adaptation for African countries

Commonwealth Alumnus Derek Apell showcased the innovative strategies employed by the African Development Bank (AfDB) to attract private climate finance for adaptation efforts in African countries.



February 2025

Improving teaching practices in crisis settings

Commonwealth Alumnus Siddharth Pillai discusses the opportunities and challenges of improving teaching and coaching practices in crisis settings.



April 2025

The role of social enterprises in aiding developing nations in attaining the UN SDGs: The Jamaican context

Commonwealth Alumnus Edward Dixon will discuss the role of social entrepreneurship in addressing third sector challenges in the development aid landscape.



Get involved

You can stay part of the CSC community through attending events across the Commonwealth, by promoting our Scholarships and Fellowships to potential applicants, by joining our alumni associations and other networks, and by keeping us up to date with your recent achievements and challenges.

Alumni Associations

Meet and network with Commonwealth Alumni through your local Alumni Association. CSC alumni-run associations are present in the following countries:



Scan to find out more about Alumni Associations

Share your updates with us

We always love to hear from Commonwealth Scholars and Alumni via email or our social media channels about events you have been involved with, development activities you have undertaken, awards you have won or papers you have published.

Update your details

If you are an alumnus of the Commonwealth Scholarship Commission (CSC) and would like to update your details, or reconnect with the CSC, please complete our alumni update form. Please email alumni@cscuk.org.uk if you have any queries.



Scan to update your details

Alumni stories

Read in further detail how Commonwealth Alumni have made an impact within their organisations and communities, and across nations and internationally, by visiting our website.



Scan to find read our development impact stories

Events

Find out about upcoming CSC community events:



[linkedin.com/company/cscuk](https://www.linkedin.com/company/cscuk)



[@commonwealthscholarships](https://www.facebook.com/commonwealthscholarships)



cscuk.fcdo.gov.uk



Scan to find out more about upcoming events



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COMMONWEALTH
SCHOLARSHIPS

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Commonwealth Scholars at the Master's Conference at Cumberland Lodge, Windsor, UK.



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