COMMONWEALTH SCHOLARSHIPS

Skills, Networks, and Development Impact:

A Contribution Analysis of Commonwealth Scholarships

Full Report

The authors would like to gratefully acknowledge all Commonwealth Scholars and Alumni whose participation in our data collection activities underpinned this report. Every individual who has taken the time to complete a survey or sit for an interview has contributed immensely to the quality and depth of this report. It is genuinely appreciated by the CSC, who would not have been able to do this work without you.

Thank you.

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Executive Summary

This report presents the Commonwealth Scholarship Commission's (CSC) first application of the Contribution Analysis methodology to assess the extent to which its scholarship programmes contribute to sustainable development outcomes. Building on a well-established Theory of Change and a mature monitoring and evaluation system, the analysis examines the full results chain from inputs and activities through to outputs, outcomes, and impact. Using longitudinal survey data, administrative data, and counterfactual comparisons, this report develops an evidence-based contribution narrative, assessing whether the programme is operating as intended and identifying areas where evidence can be strengthened.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that the CSC programme is functioning effectively and contributing meaningfully to development outcomes, with particularly strong evidence at the level of outputs and intermediate outcomes. While attribution remains complex at higher levels of impact, the analysis confirms that the Theory of Change is broadly valid, and that key pathways are well supported by the available evidence, especially those related to skills development and network formation.

Programme delivery and immediate experience

The evidence shows that the inputs and delivery mechanisms of the CSC programme are robust and functioning as intended. Financial support through Grant in Aid from the UK Government enables delivery of scholarships, covering tuition, stipends, research support, and administrative costs. This funding is complemented by contributions from university partners.

Scholars are the direct beneficiaries, and evaluation data consistently shows that many would not have been able to undertake equivalent study without the scholarship. Surveys indicate high levels of satisfaction with academic and living experiences in the UK, including the quality of education, research environments, and support provided by the CSC and partner institutions, however challenges such as cost of living, wellbeing concerns, and cultural adjustment are also reported.

Partnership arrangements with nominating agencies, universities, and other stakeholders were also found to be functioning as intended. Selection processes prioritise academic merit, development relevance, and equity considerations, and there is strong evidence that selected scholars are of high academic calibre and contribute positively to their host institutions. Overall, the evidence strongly supports the assumption that the foundational inputs of the programme are well aligned with its objectives.

Activities and delivery processes

The programme's activities, including academic study, research, and engagement opportunities, are also largely delivered as intended. There is strong evidence that scholars value their courses of study, which consistently meet expectations in terms of quality and relevance. While the Covid-19 pandemic temporarily disrupted delivery and reduced satisfaction levels, the subsequent recovery suggests that under normal conditions, academic provision is robust and effective.

Research support is similarly well evidenced, with scholars reporting high levels of satisfaction with supervision, access to resources, and the overall research environment. These findings reinforce the assumption that the programme provides a strong platform for academic and research development.

However, the analysis highlights a key limitation in relation to development training and broader engagement activities. While participants view these positively and report high-quality delivery, the CSC currently lacks sufficient evidence linking these activities to longer-term development outcomes. In particular, there is limited data demonstrating how training and engagement translate into post-award career progression or impact. As a result, these components represent an important area where the evidence base would benefit from further strengthening.

Outputs: skills, qualifications, and networks

At the output level, the programme demonstrates strong and consistent evidence of effectiveness. Scholars report significant development across a wide range of skills, including leadership, technical expertise, analytical thinking, and research capacity. The vast majority successfully complete their qualifications, confirming that the programme delivers its intended academic outputs.

Research outputs are also a key strength. Many alumni continue to engage in research activities related to their scholarship, and there is evidence of increased academic publishing, research collaboration, and funding applications. This highlights the sustained influence of the scholarship on scholars' academic and professional trajectories.

In addition, the programme supports the development of enduring networks and relationships, particularly with UK-based institutions and international peers. While the intensity of contact may decline over time, most scholars maintain these relationships, and comparative evidence suggests that the scholarship plays a clear role in strengthening professional and academic connections. These networks contribute both to individual career progression and to broader soft power and collaboration outcomes.

Outcomes: application and influence

The analysis provides substantial evidence that alumni apply their skills and knowledge effectively in workplace and non-employment contexts. Alumni report using their learning to solve problems in new ways, influence decision-making, and introduce changes within their organisations. Many also engage in knowledge-sharing activities, including training colleagues and developing organisational resources, demonstrating a clear multiplier effect.

Comparative data indicates that alumni are more likely than counterfactual respondents to take on leadership roles, initiate projects, pursue funding opportunities, and establish new organisations or departments. There is also strong evidence of increased involvement in postgraduate teaching and doctoral supervision, suggesting that the programme contributes to the development of future generations of researchers and professionals.

However, the analysis notes that some indicators, particularly those relating to innovation and research application, are not always directly linked to specific research outputs. This limits the

ability to fully assess how research findings are translated into practice and suggests a need to refine both the conceptualisation and measurement of this aspect of the Theory of Change.

Development impact and higher-level outcomes

At the level of broader development impact, the report identifies a credible but more complex and uneven contribution narrative. Alumni report contributions across economic, policy, social, and environmental spheres, with particularly strong and consistent trends in economic and policy-related impacts.

The programme appears to play a role in facilitating national and international-level impact, where alumni show positive trends relative to counterfactual groups. There is evidence of growing engagement in policy processes and international collaboration, although statistical associations between scholarship receipt and impact are relatively modest at earlier follow-up points.

At the local and institutional levels, differences between alumni and counterfactual groups are less pronounced, and reported impact trends are broadly similar. This suggests that the programme's influence at these levels may be more strongly shaped by contextual factors.

The analysis also highlights the interconnected nature of development impact, where outcomes span multiple sectors and levels. However, it acknowledges important limitations, including reliance on self-reported data and a lack of long-term counterfactual evidence beyond the early post-award period.

Strength of the Theory of Change and conclusions

Across the main pathways in the Theory of Change (Basic Programme, Skills and Knowledge, Network Development, and Research) the findings provide strong overall support. The most robust evidence relates to skills development and knowledge application, followed by network development and research continuity.

Three areas consistently emerge as relatively weaker in evidential terms:

- the CSC's Development Training Programme
- Other CSC engagement activities
- the application of research findings

Importantly, these gaps currently reflect limitations in available data rather than evidence of ineffectiveness. The report concludes that the Theory of Change is sound and largely validated, but that targeted data collection and conceptual refinement are needed to strengthen specific components.

Implications and next steps

The Contribution Analysis identifies clear priorities for strengthening both the evidence base and the programme's long-term impact. Key actions include:

- expanding and strengthening the counterfactual dataset, particularly over longer time periods

- collecting more robust evidence on the CSC's Development Training Programme and engagement activities
- refining how the application of research findings is conceptualised and measured
- continuing the iterative refinement of the Theory of Change based on emerging evidence

Overall, the report affirms the CSC as an effective and strategically relevant intervention for building human capital, strengthening international networks, and supporting research capacity. While development impact cannot be fully attributed to the programme alone, the analysis provides a well-substantiated account of contribution, alongside a clear roadmap for enhancing both impact and evaluative rigour over time.

Introduction

Since 2008, the Commonwealth Scholarship Commission (CSC) has had a dedicated monitoring and evaluation function to assess the impact of its programmes. Its purpose has been to demonstrate that the programme is achieving its goal of delivering sustainable development through the post-award activities of Commonwealth Scholars and Fellows. Two of the overarching goals of the CSC's evaluation work are to constantly develop the evidence base around the impact of its programmes, and to continually explore the use of new methodologies.

In pursuit of these goals the CSC investigated the use of the Contribution Analysis methodology. As summarised in HM Treasury's Magenta Book on evaluation, Contribution Analysis is a:

> 'Step-by-step process used to examine if an intervention has contributed to an observed outcome by exploring a range of evidence for the Theory of Change. It gives an evidenced line of reasoning rather than definitive proof.'[1]

This methodology was deemed appropriate for the CSC given it had both a well-articulated Theory of Change as well as a substantial and mature body of monitoring and evaluation data at its disposal. A Contribution Analysis serves the first goal of the CSC's evaluation work as an important element of a Contribution Analysis is that it is an iterative process whereby the Theory of Change is reviewed against the evidence available and both gaps in the evidence and inaccuracies in the Theory of Change are identified. Subsequently, further data collection and revision of the Theory of Change is done, strengthening the evidence base. This methodology also contributes to the second goal by introducing a more sophisticated methodological approach to the CSC's evaluation work.

Purpose and Methodology

This report represents the CSC's first output based on the Contribution Analysis methodology. Its purpose is to share the findings of the Contribution Analysis conducted by the CSC's evaluation team; not only as a record of this work, but as a contribution to the evidence base regarding both the impact of Commonwealth Scholarships and to the wider sectoral corpus of scholarship evaluation.

A full breakdown of the methodology, data sources, and analytical techniques used can be found in Appendix A. In summary, a Contribution Analysis methodically examines every element of a programme's Theory of Change using all available data in order to assess the strength of evidence showing that the process outlined in the Theory of Change is taking place. The CSC's evaluation team analysed a mix of quantitative and qualitative data using descriptive and comparative statistics, and thematic analyses. No artificial intelligence was used during the analysis stage of the project, however it was used to shorten a few subsections during the copy edit stage to improve

[1] HM Treasury, *Magenta Book; Central Government guidance on evaluation*, 45.

readability. All AI-generated outputs were reviewed by the CSC evaluation team prior to inclusion in the report.

Report Structure

After this introduction, the next section of this report provides background context overviewing the CSC's Theory of Change which forms the basis for this report. The background section is then followed by the main section of the report. This main body of the report is broken into sections covering the Commonwealth Scholarship programme's inputs, activities, outputs, outcomes, and impact, mirroring the general structure of a Theory of Change and providing a sense of how the programme is delivered from start to finish.

Each section of the main body is broken down into a series of subsections that focuses on each component of that part of the Theory of Change. These subsections provide a brief description of what that component is, any assumptions about that component's role in the Theory of Change, and then an analysis of the relevant data and evidence. At the end of each of the five main sections there is a broader overview and analysis which reflects on the strengths and weaknesses of the evidence covered in that section, and an analysis of the extent to which they support or disprove that part of the Theory of Change.

The report ends with a summary of the overall analysis, and a reflection on the next steps to be taken based on the findings, including any areas that warrant additional data collection or redevelopment of the Theory of Change.

There is also an appendix at the end of the report which provides details on the data sources and analytic approaches used for this report, including a detailed description of the Contribution Analysis methodology.

Background: Commonwealth Scholarship Commission Theory of Change

The CSC Theory of Change is a visual representation of the different actors and processes that are involved in the Commonwealth Scholarship intervention. Its purpose is to articulate the relationships between stakeholders, activities, and outcomes, and how they contribute to the different pathways of change through which the CSC meets its objectives. A narrative accompaniment was also created to both contextualise the Theory of Change and to act as a glossary that provides additional definition for terms that for brevity's sake are not included in the diagram. This supporting narrative is the basis upon which this report is structured as it provides important information regarding the Theory of Change, including:

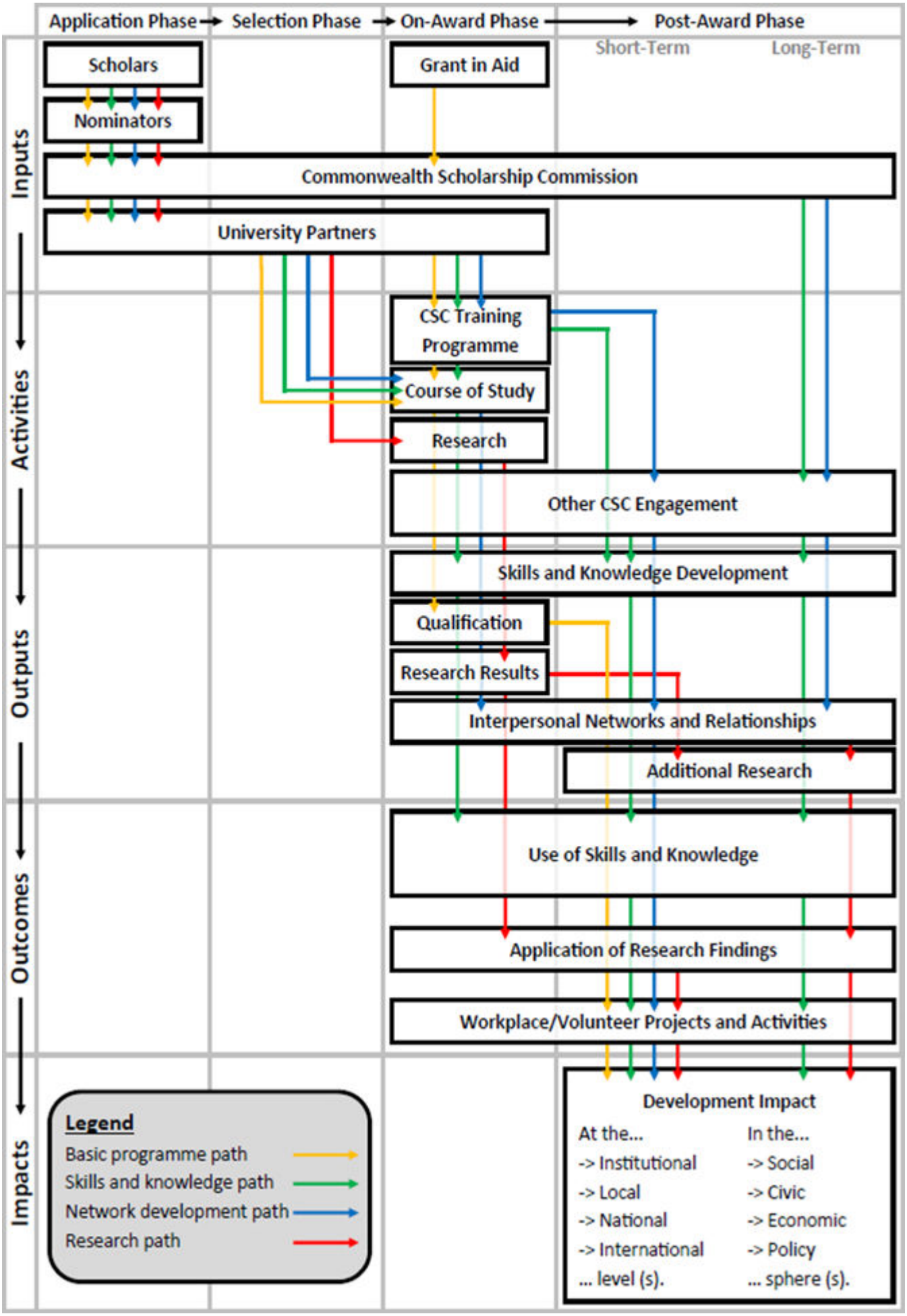
- A detailed description of what comprises the stakeholder, activity, or outcome;
- Any assumptions made about that stakeholder, activity, or outcome;
- Any enabling or constraining factors that exist that may enhance or inhibit that stakeholder, activity, or outcome; and,
- Any monitoring or evaluation data, studies, or reports held by the CSC on that stakeholder, activity, or outcome.

This background section provides a brief overview of the Theory of Change and the four pathways illustrated in the diagram. The four pathways illustrated in the Theory of Change (see Figure 1) are:

- the **basic programme pathway**, which describes how the overall scholarship programme is structured and its expected sustainable development impact;
- the **skills and knowledge pathway**, which describes how the skills and knowledge gained from studies contribute to institutional capacity building and sustainable development impact;
- the **network development pathway**, which describes how the scholarship experience contributes to the development of interpersonal networks and soft power, and;
- the **research pathway**, which describes how research activities conducted during and post scholarship contribute to both additional research and the application of research findings towards sustainable developmental impact.

It is important to note that the Commonwealth Scholarships programme is comprised of multiple unique schemes and that not every scheme is intended to contribute equally to these pathways. For instance, the PhD and Split-site schemes, which focus on doctoral studies and research, play a far greater role in the research pathway than the Master's schemes. However, because this version of the Theory of Change is designed to encompass all of the CSC's scholarship activities, it reflects the contributions of all schemes to the objectives of the overarching programme.

Figure 1 – CSC Theory of Change



Pathways

There are four pathways of change that contribute to the ultimate goal of sustainable development impact: the basic programme path, the skills and knowledge path, the network development path, and the research path.

Basic Programme Path

The basic programme pathway represents the core concept of Commonwealth Scholarships. Scholars are either nominated for a Scholarship by a Nominating Agency or apply directly to the Commonwealth Scholarship Commission to study at the UK University partners. The CSC then provides scholarships funded by Grant in Aid to selected Scholars who go on to both pursue their Course of Study and to participate in the CSC Development Training Programme. Upon completion of their Course of Study, Scholars receive a graduate-level Qualification which provides them with the opportunity to pursue employment and volunteer opportunities where they engage in projects and activities that have a sustainable developmental impact.

While this is the core concept of how Commonwealth Scholarships work, it does not convey the full breadth of the activities that occur over the course of the Commonwealth Scholarship journey that contribute towards the ultimate goal of sustainable development impact. Thus, there are three other pathways of significance contained in the Theory of Change.

Skills and Knowledge Path

The skills and knowledge pathway is the first of these three pathways and details the different ways in which Scholars acquire and then apply new skills and knowledge. Scholars who are successfully selected for a Scholarship are provided with a number of different learning opportunities during and after their Scholarship. In addition to the soft skills and discipline-specific skills and knowledge that they learn from their Course of Study, Scholars are also provided with access to other learning opportunities through the CSC Development Training Programme.

The first of these, which they are invited to upon receiving their Scholarship, is the CSC's online course 'Understanding Development Impact', which teaches Scholars about sustainable development, current best practice in the sector, and a number of skills and tools that they can use to maximise the impact of their work throughout their career. Second, Scholars also have access to additional learning opportunities from external training providers organised by the CSC Engagement Team where they can learn soft skills that they will be able to use during and after their Scholarship. Third, learning opportunities are provided by the CSC Alumni Team through online platforms such as the CSC Knowledge Hubs, webinars, and Alumni events. Taken together these activities all contribute to the Skills and Knowledge Development of Scholars, which leads to the immediate Use of Skills and Knowledge in work and non-work settings, and the teaching and sharing of the skills and knowledge they have developed with others. This Use of Skills and Knowledge contribute to Workplace/Volunteer Projects and Activities that the Scholar or Alumni is involved in, which contribute to sustainable development impact.

Network Development Path

The network development path is the second of the three additional pathways and demonstrates the way in which Scholars build relationships and networks during their Scholarship Journey, creating opportunities for future collaborations that represent tangible soft power outcomes of the programme.

Commonwealth Scholars and Alumni build relationships with each other through the CSC Development Training Programme as well as Other CSC Engagement activities, creating networks of relationships that span the Commonwealth. Scholars also build relationships with their fellow students, teachers and supervisors, and others over their Course of Study, developing linkages between themselves, individuals and institutions in the UK, and other international students. These bilateral relationships with people in the UK are an important soft power outcome both for the UK and for the Scholar's home country.

All of this relationship building results in strengthened Interpersonal Networks and Relationships that Scholars, Alumni, and in many cases their home institutions and employers can draw upon for the rest of their lives. They can also lead to collaborations that contribute to the Workplace/Volunteer Projects and Activities that Scholars and Alumni pursue during their careers, which contribute to sustainable development impact.

Research Path

The third additional pathway is the research path, which articulates how the research conducted by Scholars and Alumni feed into sustainable development impact. This pathway is primarily driven by Doctoral and Split-site Scholars, but not exclusively. The first point at which Commonwealth Scholars are involved in Research is during their time studying at their UK university. This Research then leads to Research Findings, which in turn can lead to one or both of the Application of Research Findings, and Additional Research that builds upon the initial piece of Research they conducted during their Commonwealth Scholarship.

This Additional Research can also be fed into by Scholars' Interpersonal Networks and Relationships, which can lead to collaborations on projects involving Additional Research. This Additional Research then feeds into the Application of Research Findings, which in turn feeds directly into Workplace/Volunteer Projects and Activities that have a sustainable developmental impact.

Section One: Inputs

Introduction

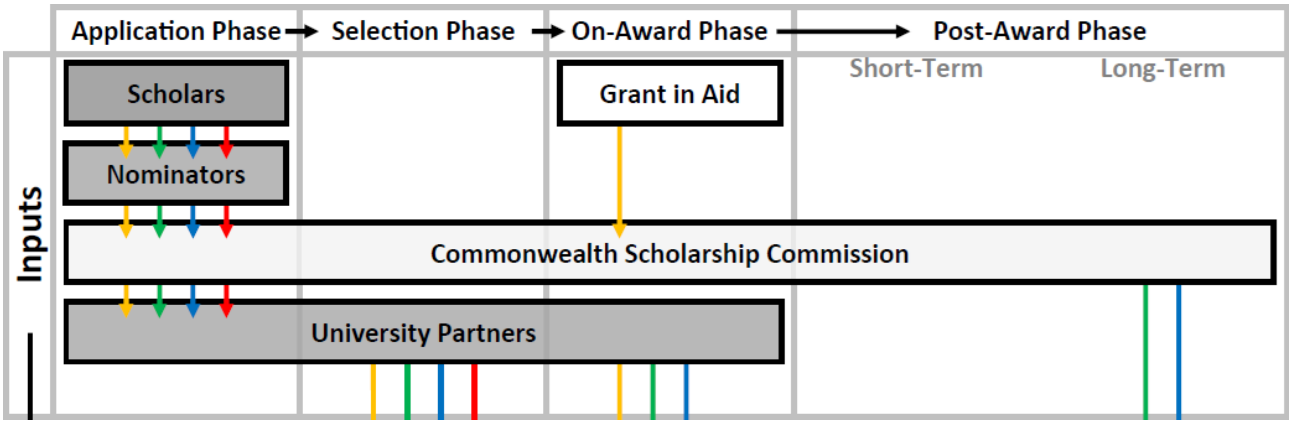
Components in the Inputs section are the 'ingredients' that contribute to the subsequent processes throughout the Theory of Change, aiming to generate a sustainable development impact, as covered in Part Five: Impact. These include the financial and other contributions from the UK government and University Partners, the Scholars who apply directly or are nominated, and the Commonwealth Scholarship Commission, which administers the early stages of the process, sets programme policies, and provides additional support in the middle and later stages, as covered in Part Two: Activities.

Grant in Aid

Introduction

Grant in Aid is the funding provided by the UK Government to the Commonwealth Scholarship Commission. This is the primary, but not sole, source of funding for Commonwealth Scholarships (see University Partners) and flows through the Commonwealth Scholarship Commission in the UK, which administers the funding and the programme. While the funding is primarily spent in the On-Award Phase of the scholarship through tuition fees and stipends, it also covers the cost of programme administration and activities throughout the different phases of the scholarship.

Figure 2 – Grant in Aid



FROM: [UK Government]
INTO: Commonwealth Scholarship Commission

The vast majority of the Grant in Aid is Official Development Assistance (ODA) funding, meaning the Commonwealth Scholarship programme aligns with and contributes to the UK Aid Strategy. Consequently, the programme also contributes to the Sustainable Development Goals, particularly Goal 4.b, which aims to 'substantially expand globally the number of scholarships available to developing countries, in particular least developed countries, Small Island Developing States, and African countries, for enrolment in higher education [by 2020]'.[2]

[2] "Goal 4", United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, accessed 24 July 2026, https://sdgs.un.org/goals/goal4#targets_and_indicators.

Analysis

For the financial year 2022/23, the Commonwealth Scholarship Commission's Annual Report indicated an expenditure of over 28.2 million GBP, similar to the 2021/22 financial year, with 98% spent on funding mobilities.[3] The administrative costs for this period were 1.5% of the budget.[4] The direct expenditure breakdown shows 32% was spent on PhDs, 17% on Shared Scholarships, 13% each on Agency-nominated Master's and Distance Learning Scholars, and 7% on Split-site PhDs.[5]

In addition to UK Government funding, financial support is also provided by the CSC's University Partners through tuition reductions and stipends. [6] It is important to note the funding support that the CSC has received from its University Partners primarily comes in the form of tuition fee reductions. The nature and amount of the financial contributions varies between the different Scholarship programmes offered by the CSC. For example, for the general Doctoral and Master's Scholarship schemes University Partners have contributed approximately 1.1 million GBP in total for the year 2023, or just under 8,000 GBP per Scholar. Similarly, for the Commonwealth Split-site Scholarships, the contribution was 0.3 million GBP, or about 6,500 GBP per Scholar, while for Commonwealth Distance Learning Scholarships, it was approximately 1,500 GBP per Scholar.[7]

The largest financial contribution from University Partners is towards Commonwealth Shared Scholarships. They not only provide tuition fee reductions but also pay stipends for Scholars' living expenses. In 2023, University Partners contributed approximately 4.4 million GBP in stipends and 0.6 million GBP in tuition fee reductions. The average UK University Partner tuition fee contribution was 5,000 GBP per Scholar, demonstrating significant support and commitment on the part of these partners.[8]

Scholars

Introduction

While they appear as an input at the application stage, Commonwealth Scholars are the primary and most lasting target of intervention for the Commonwealth Scholarship programme. The core of the programme is the investment in the skills and knowledge that Scholars acquire while on-award, the outcomes from their research, and the impact of their work upon graduating.

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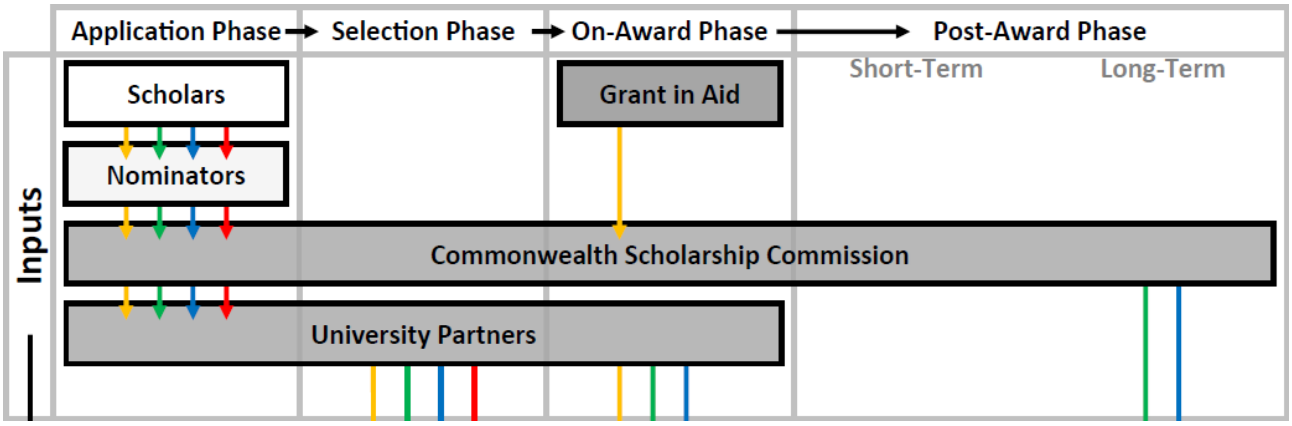
[3] Commonwealth Scholarship Commission, *Forging a sustainable and peaceful common future; Annual Report for the year ending 30 September 2023*, 64.
[4] Internal Figures.
[5] Commonwealth Scholarship Commission, *Forging a sustainable and peaceful common future; Annual Report for the year ending 30 September 2023*, 66.
[6] For more information on University Partners, see section on University Partners below.
[7] Internal figures.
[8] Ibid.

Figure 3 – Scholars



FROM: N/A
INTO: Nominators, [Commonwealth Scholarship Commission]

There are differing routes through which Scholars apply for Commonwealth Scholarships depending on the scheme. Scholars for Master's study apply indirectly and are nominated by a UK university, a nominating agency in their home country, or an NGO. FCDO-funded Doctoral Scholars apply through nominating agencies, NGOs, or their employing institution in their home country, while Commonwealth Split-Site Scholars apply directly to the CSC.

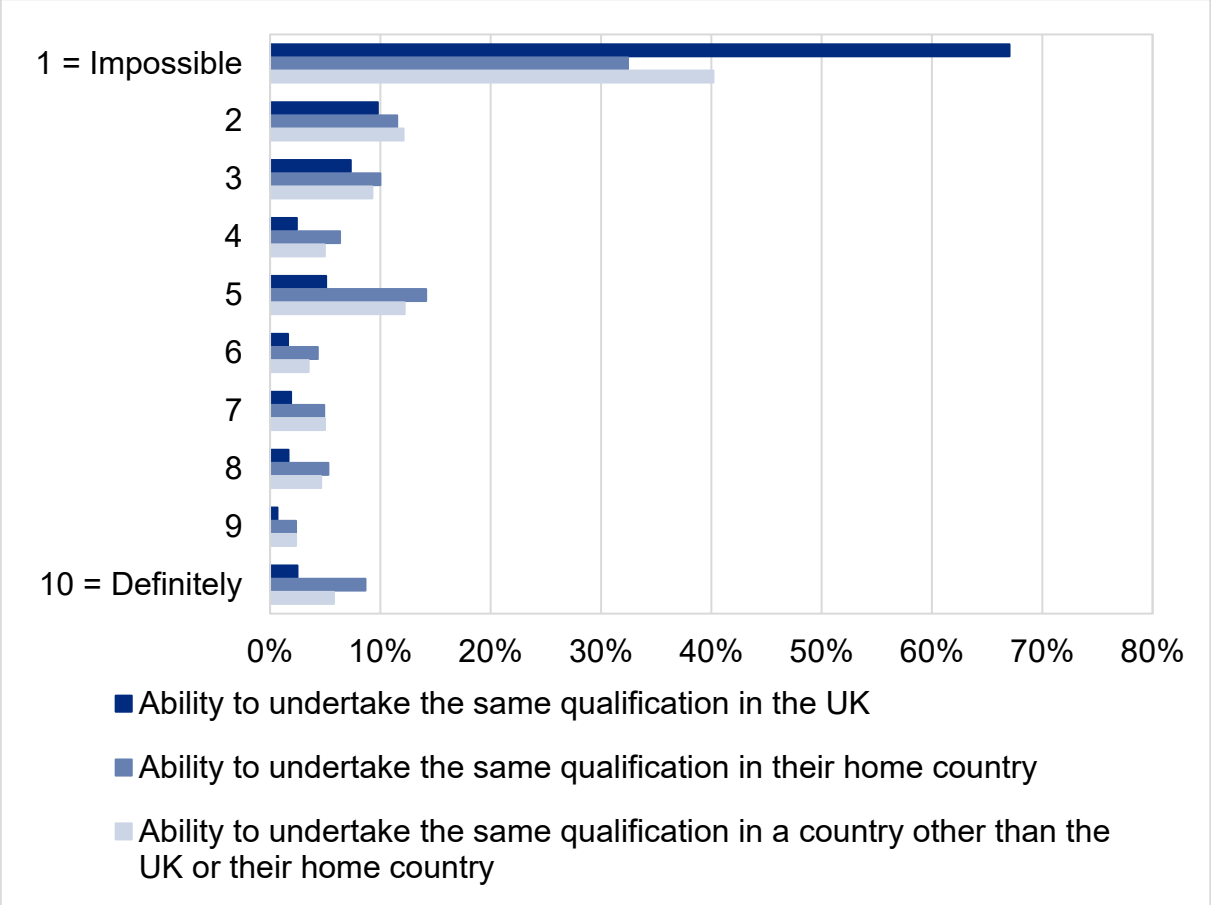
Analysis

To date, over 31,000 people have taken up a Commonwealth Scholarship since the first group of 175 Scholars arrived in the UK in 1960. Annually, between 2020 and 2023, the Commonwealth Scholarship Commission has funded approximately 300 PhDs, 100 Split-site PhDs, 100 Master's, 200 Shared Master's, 900 Distance Learning Master's, and 15 Fellows. For PhD and Distance Learning Master's, Scholar funding spans multiple years.

Access

An important element of Scholar selection is to provide access to UK-based study to those who might otherwise not get the opportunity. Figure 4 shows trends reported by recipients about their ability to undertake the same qualification in the UK, their home country, or a third country without a Commonwealth Scholarship. When asked, the majority of recipients reported that they would have been unable to undertake the same qualification without their Scholarship, with two-thirds of them reporting that they would have found it impossible to do so in the UK without the award.

Figure 4 – Ability to undertake same qualification in the absence of Commonwealth Scholarship



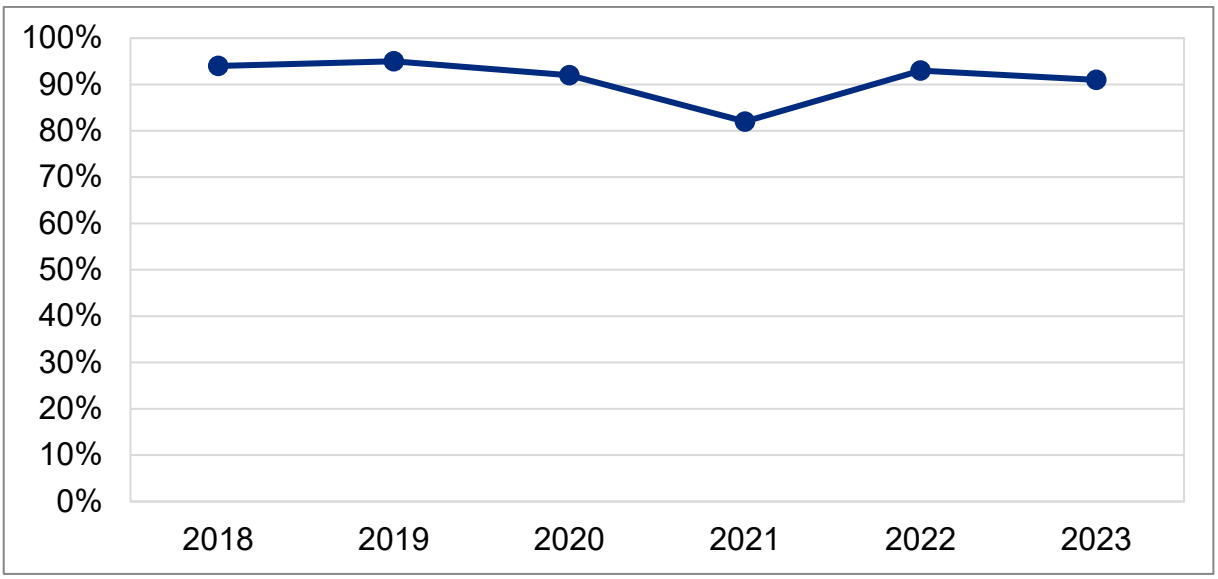
Source: Longitudinal Baseline Survey 2016–2023

Experience Living and Studying in the UK

An important aspect of the Scholar experience is having a positive experience living and studying in the United Kingdom. In the annual Scholar Experience Survey, Scholars are asked to rate their overall experience of living and studying in the UK.[9] Respondents generally reported high levels of satisfaction, with the proportion of Scholars rating their experience as 'Good' or 'Excellent' consistently above 80% from 2018-2023 as seen in Figure 5. In 2021, the proportion dropped to 82% however this was directly attributable to the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, including travel restrictions, lockdowns, and remote study. As the pandemic receded, these ratings returned to pre-pandemic levels.

[9] Note: Commonwealth Distance Learning Scholars do not receive this survey.

Figure 5 – Overall experience of living and studying in the UK – 'Excellent' or 'Good'



Source: Scholar Experience Survey 2018-2023

An analysis was also done on the frequency of words that respondents to the 2023 Scholar Experience Survey employed most frequently when writing about the best aspect of their time in the UK. One of the most frequently mentioned words was 'research', with additional words relating to this theme including 'access', 'environment', 'learning', 'supervisors', and 'facilities'. This gives a broad overview of the elements of the academic experience that Scholars valued most highly. 'Different' and 'people' were also among the most frequently mentioned words, with 'new', 'world', 'networking', 'culture', 'meeting', and 'diverse' also featuring in relation to this theme. These comments also indicate that Scholars valued the opportunity to meet new people and experience new and diverse cultures whilst studying in the UK.

Scholars were also asked what the worst aspect of their time in the UK was. The two words employed most frequently by the 2023 Scholars when discussing the worst aspect of their time in the UK were 'cost' and 'living', indicating that financial hardship was a key issue for Scholars whilst they were in the UK. Related words included 'high', accommodation' and 'stipend'. The frequency of the word 'accommodation' is further reflective of the difficulty of finding affordable student-friendly accommodation in the UK. Other frequently use words include 'weather', 'cold', 'winter', 'family', 'home' and 'health'. This suggests that Scholars struggled to adjust to the UK's climate, and experienced other difficulties related to being away from home.

Nominators

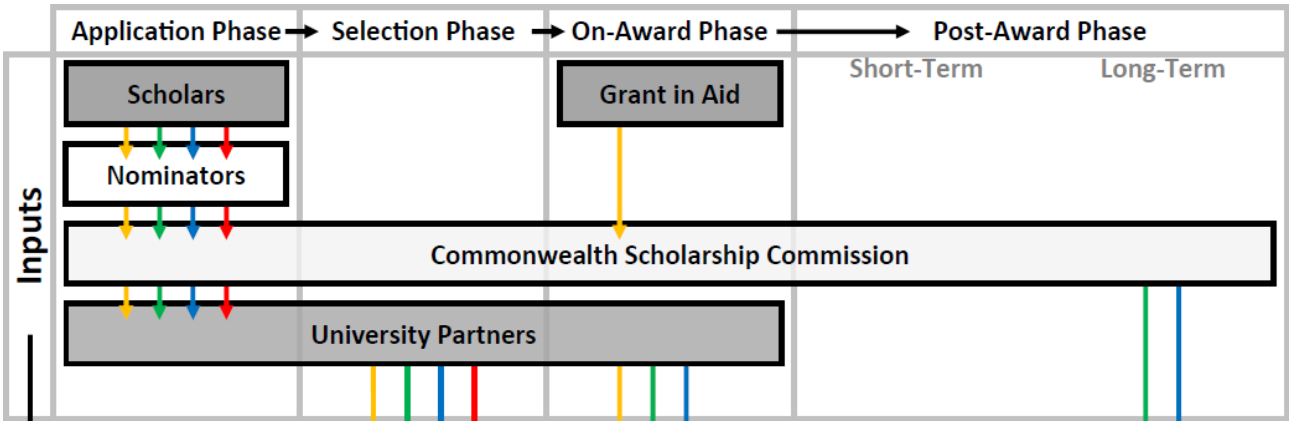
Introduction

Nominators are external organisations through which potential Scholars can apply for a Commonwealth Scholarship and conduct the first assessment of applications before passing longlisted candidates to the CSC for the second round of assessment by Commissioners and Academic Advisors[10] (except for the Shared Scholarships and Distance Learning schemes, where

[10] Academic Advisors are non-Commissioner volunteers who contribute their time to the CSC by reviewing Scholar applications in their subject of specialisation and contributing an independent expert assessment during the selection process.

University Partners conduct the second round of assessment). Depending on the scheme, Nominators are either National Nominating Agencies, representatives of other Commonwealth governments often based in the Ministries of Education, Human Resources or similar, NGOs, or Universities located in the UK or overseas. National Nominating Agencies play a crucial role in the wider Commonwealth Scholarship and Fellowship Plan, and the range of Nominators the CSC works with ensures that the Commission's programmes reflect national and sectoral priorities.

Figure 6 – Nominators



FROM: Scholars
INTO: Commonwealth Scholarship Commission

Analysis

The CSC works with governments and trusted partners across the Commonwealth to recruit and shortlist candidates for Master's and PhD study, and to ensure that national priorities are reflected in its awards. In addition to academic excellence and merit, National Nominating Agencies also consider their national development priorities while shortlisting candidates, ensuring potential recipients will be studying subjects that will contribute to addressing national development goals for their country. For example, in 2022-23 Health and Medicine (48%), Economic Development (39%), and Education (38%) were reported by the National Nominating Agencies as the three top national development priorities.[11]

Dr Nicole Greenidge is a Commonwealth Alumnus who completed a PhD in Human Geography at the University of Manchester in 2017. As part of her PhD studies, Nicole conducted a workshop in Barbados to gather multiple perspective of stakeholders on how to reduce flood related risks in the region. In her case study, 'Laying the Foundations for Community Resilience to Disasters and Tackling Climate Change in the Caribbean Region', she observed:

> 'When I did the application for the scholarship, I really felt that I needed to hone my skills more, and that we need to build the cadre of experts that we have in the Caribbean region.' [12]

[11] Internal figures.
[12] Commonwealth Scholarship Commission, *Laying the Foundations for Community Resilience to Disasters and Tackling Climate Change in the Caribbean Region*.

After completing her PhD, she has had the opportunity to implement the recommendations from her PhD concerning the planning required on disaster risk reduction and climate change adaptation in the Caribbean:

'They [Management Team] have given me the space to advance my research findings and to test the recommendations from my PhD. I have included recommendations from the PhD into a new policy for my country on comprehensive disaster management.'[13]

While the variety of nominating routes and individual country priorities means that in some cases criteria around subject or discipline may differ, it is important to note that the CSC also has eligibility criteria that apply to all applicants. Nominating Agencies are required to fulfil certain obligations based on the Memoranda of Understanding they have with the CSC, and it is expected that they fulfil these obligations as part of their work. However, the CSC annually collects information from Nominating Agencies through its Agency Survey to assess whether each agency is meeting their obligations, as well as whether the CSC is meeting the needs of its agencies. This data is fed into an Agency Performance Matrix, which is reviewed by the Commission to flag underperforming agencies and, in rare cases, communicate and liaise with an agency to help them meet their obligations. For some schemes, the nominating body is the University Partner, which is covered in a later section.

Equity and Opportunity

In addition to the National Nominating Agencies, the CSC also works with a small number of non-governmental organisations or charities, which focus on thematic areas and help broaden the CSC's outreach to specific under-represented demographics. These bodies include Canon Collins Trust, the Commonwealth Disabled People's Forum (CDPF), the Forum for African Women Educationalists (FAWE), the HALI Access Network, Wellcome Trust, and Windle Trust International. All of these organisations play a major role in fostering inclusion and representation in the Scholarship schemes by prioritising key populations such as people living with disabilities, low-income (HALI) students, and refugees.

Dr Tabeth Lynn Masengu was nominated by one of these partner NGOs and awarded a Commonwealth Scholarship in 2010 to study for a Master of Laws degree in Human Rights at the London School of Economics and Political Science. She subsequently pioneered and led the gender arm of judicial governance advocacy work in South Africa, focusing on promoting the inclusion of more women in the judiciary and legal profession creating both national and regional impact. In her case study, 'Promoting Gender Equality in the Judiciary and Legal Profession in South Africa', she spoke about the role of her Commonwealth Scholarship:

'The Scholarship allowed me to gain work opportunities in Human Rights Law and to pursue a joint doctorate degree in law. I am the University of Cape Town's (UCT) first

[13] Ibid.

ever joint doctorate degree holder from the Faculty of Law. This historical achievement could not have been possible if I had not completed my Master of Human Rights Law as a Commonwealth Scholar.'[14]

Academic Advisors

The CSC also works closely with a panel of nearly 400 Academic Advisers, including internationally renowned experts in all subject areas. These experts voluntarily provide support and review Scholarship applications by rating them based on merit, the quality of the proposal, and its development impact. These experts are important partners for the CSC, as their work supports the selection of candidates who propose solutions to key development issues, resulting in the CSC promoting cutting-edge research, innovation, and knowledge exchange throughout the Commonwealth.

Furthermore, these advisers also help to identify the most suitable universities in the UK that offer state-of-the-art courses in their subject areas. Therefore, while reviewing applications, they sometimes recommend the suitability of the universities selected by the applicants, ensuring that Scholars receive the support they need to study at the most relevant institutions offering the best courses in a given subject.

Commonwealth Scholarship Commission

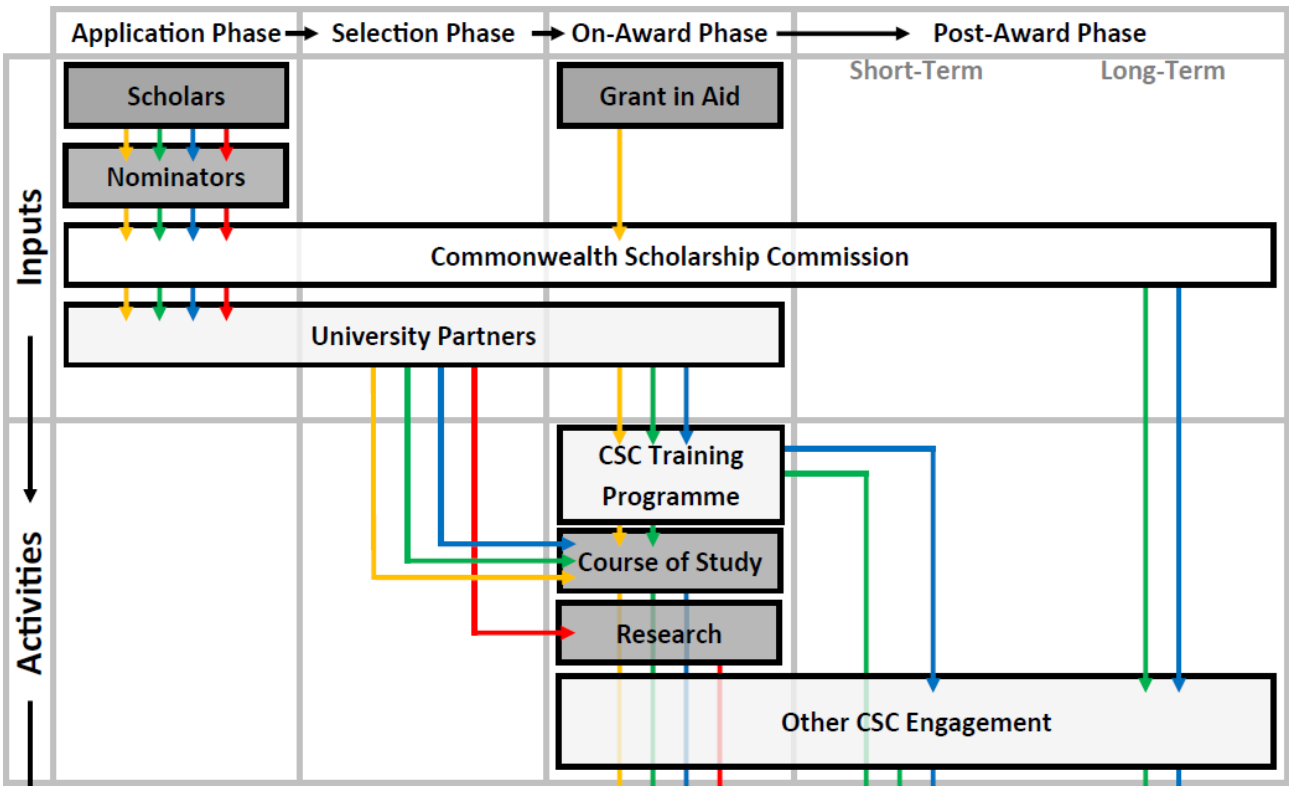
Introduction

The Commonwealth Scholarship Commission in the UK is the non-departmental government body responsible for administering the United Kingdom's contribution to the Commonwealth Scholarship and Fellowship Plan. In addition to funding, the CSC provides Scholars with many supports and resources during and after their Scholarship, including visa assistance, mental health resources, training opportunities, Scholar networks, and Alumni services. The CSC also has a monitoring and evaluation team that collects and analyses data about Scholars' experiences while studying and the impact of the Scholarship on their career and those around them.

The work of the Commission is carried out by a Board, which is appointed by the FCDO Secretary of State and comprises of 15 Commissioners (including a Chair) who provide oversight and strategic direction for the Commission and select candidates for its Scholarships, and the Secretariat, which is provided by the Association of Commonwealth Universities and carries out the day-to-day functions to support the work of the Commission. Previously, the British Council also provided support in-country both pre-award and to alumni for a selection of countries. Because the CSC is the primary actor involved in this process, it is present in some form across all phases of the Scholarship intervention and provides other activities that occur elsewhere in the Theory of Change, specifically the 'CSC Development Training Programme' and 'Other CSC Engagement' activities, including Alumni and Evaluation work.

[14] Commonwealth Scholarship Commission, *Promoting Gender Equity in the Judiciary and Legal Profession in South Africa*.

Figure 7 – Commonwealth Scholarship Commission



FROM: Grant in Aid, Nominators
INTO: University Partners, [CSC Development Training Programme], Other CSC Engagement

Analysis

As an inward-bound international scholarship programme with an explicit focus on sustainable development and soft power outcomes, Commonwealth Scholarships sit within a unique space within the UK government. CSC policy and strategy have been informed by several other government strategies, including the UK International Research and Innovation Policy (which sits within the BEIS Industrial Strategy), the UK Aid strategy, DfE's International Education Strategy and the priority development themes of the CSC's primary sponsoring department, the FCDO.

Nominator Support

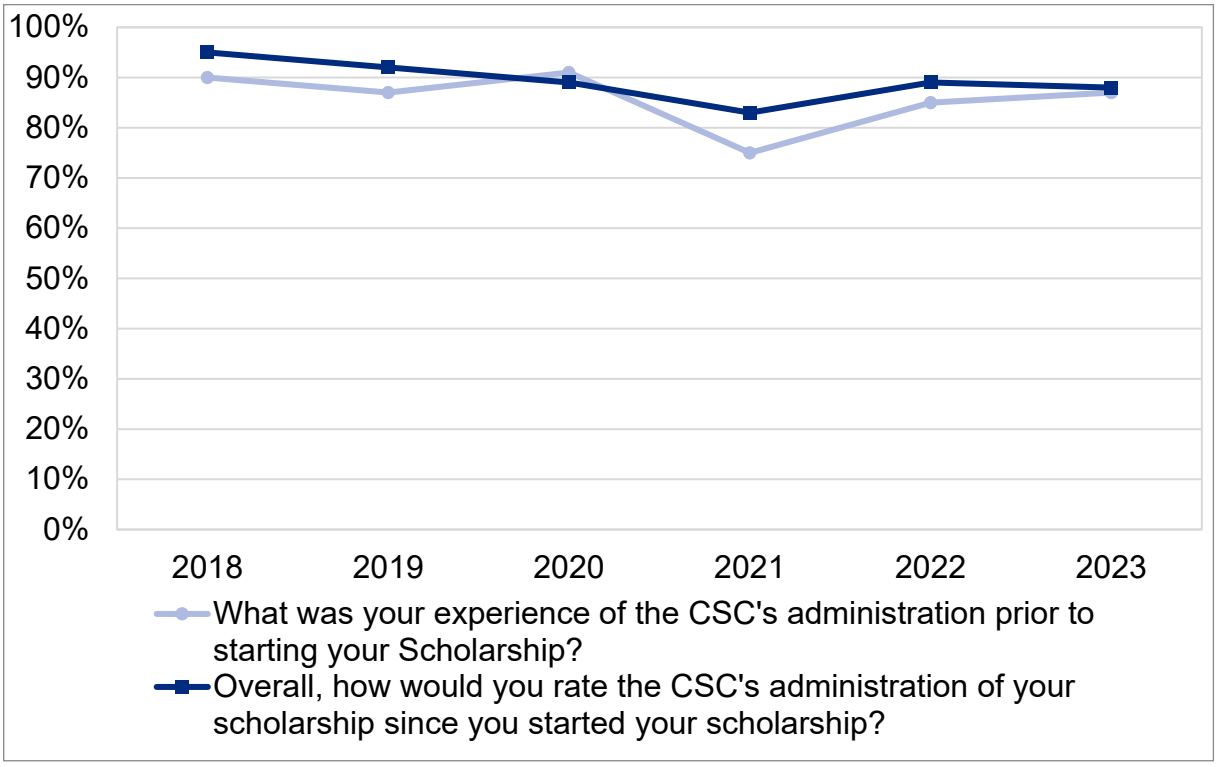
The Commonwealth Scholarship Commission is the leading partner for Scholar recruitment processes and, therefore, is also responsible for providing support to all its collaborating partners. For example, the CSC organises periodic webinars for the Nominating Agencies to discuss eligibility criteria, recruitment processes, challenges during the recruitment and advertising process, and best practices. It also issues newsletter three times a year that covers similar topics and provides general support in the form of direct contact, including one-to-one calls to discuss agency's recruitment processes. The CSC provides guidance on the recruitment and selection processes, the importance of conducting eligibility checks, how to set up a selection panel, general documentation requirements, and how to conduct recruitment that targets specific topics or development issues. Overall, the purpose of all these efforts is to maximise the experiences of the Scholars at all stages.

Scholar Support

The CSC monitors its performance in delivering Scholar support by running a Scholar Experience Survey each year, which invites UK-based Scholars to provide feedback on various aspects of their interactions with the CSC Secretariat and their UK institutions. One area where the CSC monitors its performance is its administrative support for both before and during the scholarship. In general, Scholars report positive feedback (see Figure 8) and the proportion of Scholars answering 'Good' or 'Excellent' on a five-point Likert scale remains above 80%. The only exception was the year 2021, where the chart line shows a sudden dip due to Covid-19 related disruptions.

The Scholars are also asked to report on the quality of administrative support provided during the award period. The responses mirror the feedback gathered for the support given prior to starting the scholarship. It is noteworthy that in both instances the chart lines recover back to the general trend which indicates that the administrative support provided by the CSC is of high quality.

Figure 8 – Experience with the CSC's administrative support during the pre- and on-award phases – 'Excellent' or 'Good'



Source: Scholar Experience Survey 2018-2023

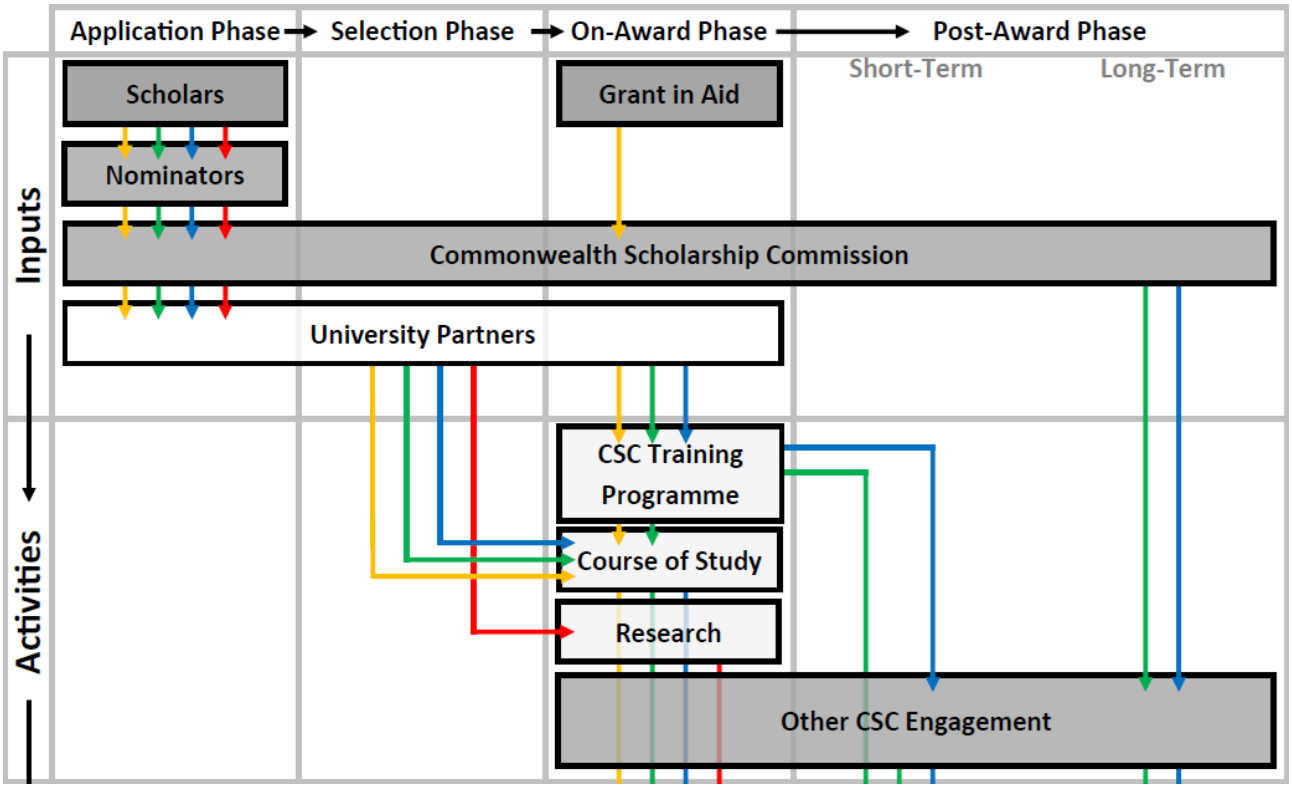
In a related free text question, Scholars were asked to provide any additional comments relating to the CSC's administration of their Scholarship. The most frequently used word in these comments was 'helpful', indicating a generally positive experience with the CSC's administration. Another frequently appearing word was 'time', in addition to 'process', 'emails', and 'administration', potentially indicating that timely communications with the Secretariat was a key concern for Scholars. Other frequently used words include 'communication', 'supportive', and 'great', suggesting generally positive views among Scholars of the Secretariat's administration and support provided during their awards.

University Partners

Introduction

The CSC's University Partners are a critical component of the Commonwealth Scholarships Theory of Change. They add to the process in many ways, contributing not only financial inputs and tuition reductions across CSC programmes, but also academic and administrative work, and institutional support. In addition to providing the educational and research experience and associated support for Scholars, University Partners act as Nominators for the Commonwealth Shared Scholarship and Distance Learning programmes.

Figure 9 – University Partners



FROM: Commonwealth Scholarship Commission
INTO: Development Training Programme, Course of Study, Research

The specific details of the partnerships between the CSC and its UK-based University Partners are slightly different for each programme. For general scholarships for Master's and PhDs, a Memorandum of Understanding is signed with the University Partners who host these Scholars, with these agreements renewed every three years. Alternatively, for Commonwealth Shared Scholarships, the partnerships result from a closed bidding process. In the bidding process, University Partners submit courses to the CSC for approval to host Commonwealth Shared Scholars prior to opening applications for the candidates. University Partners are invited to bid for up to ten Commonwealth Shared Scholarships in a given year and may put forward up to eight courses in the bid. The process is similar for the Commonwealth Distance Learning Scheme.

Analysis

The CSC plays an important role in attracting the best and brightest talent to UK universities. In return, universities support the CSC's activities through part-funding all Scholarship awards, providing matching contributions. In 2022/23, Commonwealth Scholars studied at 95 universities

across the UK.[15] In addition to National Nominating Agencies, NGOs and charities, and academic advisers, the CSC's other key collaborator is its University Partners. In particular, the Commonwealth Shared Scholarship and Distance Learning programmes are delivered collaboratively and are the main schemes where University Partners also act as nominators and have a greater role to play in both the selection process and the effective administration of the schemes.

Commonwealth Shared Scholarships

The Commonwealth Shared Scholarship programme offers awards to complete a Master's qualification at a participating UK University Partner and on a course that has been pre-selected by the CSC. The Commonwealth Shared Scholarship programme employs stricter eligibility criteria and is intended for applicants from least-developed and middle-income countries (including fragile and conflict-affected states), who have not studied in a high-income country before, who would not otherwise be able to afford to study in the UK, and who has the potential to enhance the development of their home countries with the knowledge and leadership skills they acquire.

Margret Nambatya, a Commonwealth Shared Scholarship Alumnus, studied for a Master's Degree in Engineering for Sustainable Development at the University of Cambridge in 2014. She was selected because her application proposed a novel approach to sustainable construction solutions through the use of Interlocking Stabilised Soil Block (ISSB) technology. Her case study includes an extract from her Scholarship application, where Margret wrote about her study objectives:

> 'Studying Engineering for Sustainable Development helped me to recognise and put into consideration the economic, social, environmental, technological and cultural aspects surrounding an infrastructure project…. When I return to Uganda, I hope to work as a change agent in the position of Project Manager encouraging the engineering organisations to have a mindset change from reductionist thinking to a complex system approach.' [16]

The performance of the University Partners is also monitored by the CSC on a regular basis. One of the key indicators is the quality of administrative support that Scholars receive both prior to starting their Scholarship and during the award period. As reported by the Scholars on the other schemes (see Figure 8), the Scholars on the Shared Scholarships programme provided positive feedback about their university's administrative support, with over 85% of the respondents consistently rating the quality of the support as 'Excellent' or 'Good' across all data points for both pre-award and on-award phases.

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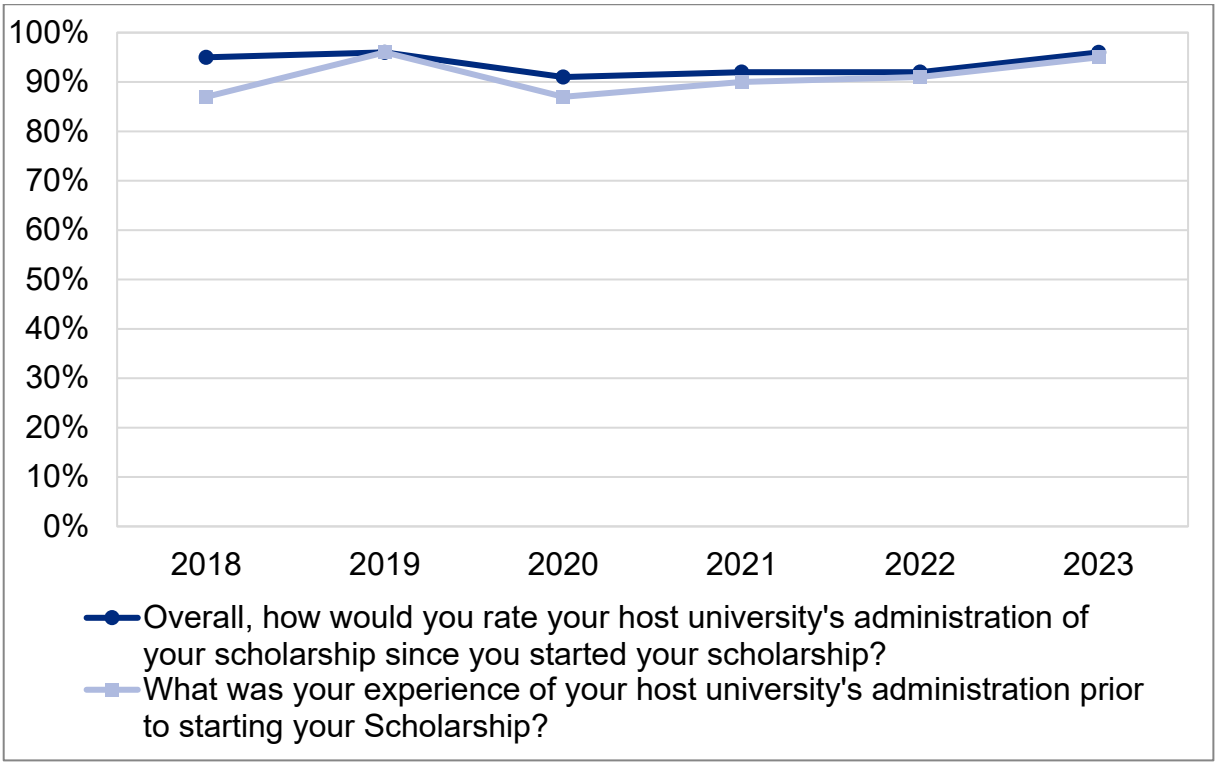
[15] Commonwealth Scholarship Commission, *Forging a sustainable and peaceful common future; Annual Report for the year ending 30 September 2023*, 52.
[16] Commonwealth Scholarship Commission, *Building a More Sustainable Future in Uganda: One Brick at a Time*.

Figure 10 – Experience with the host university's administrative support during the pre- and on-award phases – 'Excellent' or 'Good'



Source: Scholar Experience Survey 2018-2023

In a free text question, Shared Scholars were also asked to share any additional comments in relation to their university's administration of their Scholarship. The four most frequently used words were 'supportive', 'responsive', 'excellent' and 'experience' suggesting that in 2023, Scholars generally had a very positive view of their university's administration. Other frequently used words included 'great' and 'support', which further indicates that Shared Scholars often had positive experiences with their university's administration.

Commonwealth Distance Learning Scholarships

The Commonwealth Distance Learning Scholarships are for candidates from eligible low- and middle-income Commonwealth countries to undertake part-time taught Master's study with UK universities while remaining in their home countries. The programme began in 2001 and was initiated with the aim of expanding the modes of scholarship offered by the CSC. It has funded nearly 4,000 Scholars from 41 Commonwealth countries to study at 45 different higher education institutions in the UK.[17] Each participating University Partner conducts its own recruitment process to select a specified number of applicants for Commonwealth Distance Learning Scholarships and then provides the shortlist of nominees to the CSC for final selections.

The CSC conducted an evaluation of the Commonwealth Distance Learning Scholarship in 2022 to examine the benefits of one of the few international scholarships offered to support study through

[17] Harrison et al, *Expanding Horizons: The Commonwealth Distance Learning Scholarship Programme*, 5.

online and distance learning modes. As part of the evaluation, stakeholders at University Partners were asked about the benefits they derived from participating in the programme:

> 'University Providers identified many benefits that Commonwealth Distance Learning Scholars receive through their programmes of study. Chief among these is the high degree of expertise that Scholars can access from their lecturers, and the quality of the education that Scholars receive through their programme.'[18]

Commonwealth Split-site Scholarships

This was also a finding of the CSC's evaluation of its Commonwealth Split-site Scholarship programme which started in 1998, offering PhD students who are already studying at universities across the Commonwealth the opportunity to conduct research at a UK-based university for 12 months. The programme is designed to provide access to lab facilities and expertise in the UK for high-quality doctoral candidates from low- and middle-income Commonwealth countries, and to contribute to UK and Commonwealth higher education and research through collaboration and partnerships.[19]

According to the review, the overall benefits for the Scholars included 'the international experience and ability to access otherwise unavailable resources including knowledge and equipment',[20] while the benefits for the Supervisors from both the host and home institutions included the 'contribution of the scholar to their departments' research outputs' as well as the intercultural experience that both the staff and students at host institutions enjoyed.[21] The review also concluded that the presence of Split-site Scholars 'helped to raise the reputation and international profile of their universities'.[22]

Summary and Analysis

Commonwealth Scholarships are delivered through a combination of inputs, including Grant in Aid as a financial contribution, Scholars as the direct beneficiaries, and delivery partners such as the Commonwealth Scholarship Commission, Nominators, and University Partners. While much of the data on inputs is management and programme data, there is some evaluation data related to Scholars, the Commonwealth Scholarship Commission, and University Partners.

Overall, data on Grant in Aid demonstrates the sources of financial support for the Commonwealth Scholarships programme. The Grant in Aid, mostly from the UK government, is primarily spent on

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[18] Harrison et al, *Expanding Horizons: The Commonwealth Distance Learning Scholarship Programme*, 8.
[19] Harrison et al, *Building Bridges: The Commonwealth Split-Site Doctoral Scholarship Programme 1998-2018*, 1.
[20] Harrison et al, *Building Bridges: The Commonwealth Split-Site Doctoral Scholarship Programme 1998-2018*, 2.
[21] Harrison et al, *Building Bridges: The Commonwealth Split-Site Doctoral Scholarship Programme 1998-2018*, 3.
[22] Ibid.

recipients during the on-award phase in the form of tuition fees, research support grants, and stipends. Part of the funding also covers administrative costs and additional activities like networking events and training programmes. University Partners also contribute financially, often through tuition fee reductions, and stipends for the Commonwealth Shared Scholarships programme.

Scholars are the direct beneficiaries of the programme, and one key objective is to provide access to UK-based facilities, equipment, and expertise for those who might not otherwise have the opportunity. The Longitudinal Baseline Survey indicates that many Scholars would find it impossible to undertake the same qualification in the UK without the award. Scholar Experience Surveys consistently show high levels of satisfaction with living and studying in the UK, with common positive themes from qualitative analysis including the diversity of the UK, cultural experiences, the quality of education and academic environment, support from the CSC and universities, networking opportunities, and skill development. Challenges noted include weather, the cost of living, well-being issues from being away from home, and the intensity of the academic experience. These challenges are mitigated by support from the CSC and University Partners.

Commonwealth Scholarships are delivered in collaboration with partners including National Nominating Agencies, NGOs, charitable bodies, Academic Advisers, and University Partners. These partners have their own eligibility criteria, but common requirements include academic merit, application quality, and development impact. Additional considerations include equity and inclusion, and national development priorities. The collaborative selection process aims for representation from all participating countries and increased access for those needing additional support. Feedback from University Partners indicates that selected Scholars are of high academic standard and contribute significantly to their courses.

In terms of the quality of management by the CSC, Scholar Experience Surveys show consistently high satisfaction among Scholars. They report being highly satisfied with the administrative support from the CSC both before and during their studies, and positive feedback is also given about the quality of support from CSC staff. University Partners receive high scores from Commonwealth Shared Scholars for administrative support provided before and during their studies, with feedback from Scholars highlighting the high quality and value of this support. University Partners also value their involvement in Commonwealth Scholarships, citing the high quality of students and their contributions to departments.

Analysis

Based on the evidence discussed in the preceding sections, there is nothing to suggest that the Theory of Change model is inaccurate with respect to the Inputs that feed into the Commonwealth Scholarships programme. Furthermore, both the management data and the evaluation data suggest that the components featured within the Inputs section are working as intended: Scholars largely indicate that they would have been unable to pursue their studies without the support of the Scholarship, they overwhelmingly report positive feedback regarding their experiences studying and living in the United Kingdom, and both the CSC and University Partners are reported by Scholars to provide high-quality administrative support both before and during their studies.

Section Two: Activities

Introduction

Components in the Activities section of the Theory of Change represent the immediate programme activities occurring during the active intervention stage. These include the Scholar's academic course of study, any research conducted during their Scholarship, and the training and engagement opportunities provided by the CSC. These activities are where most immediate skills and knowledge development for Scholars takes place, leading directly to the outputs discussed in the next section.

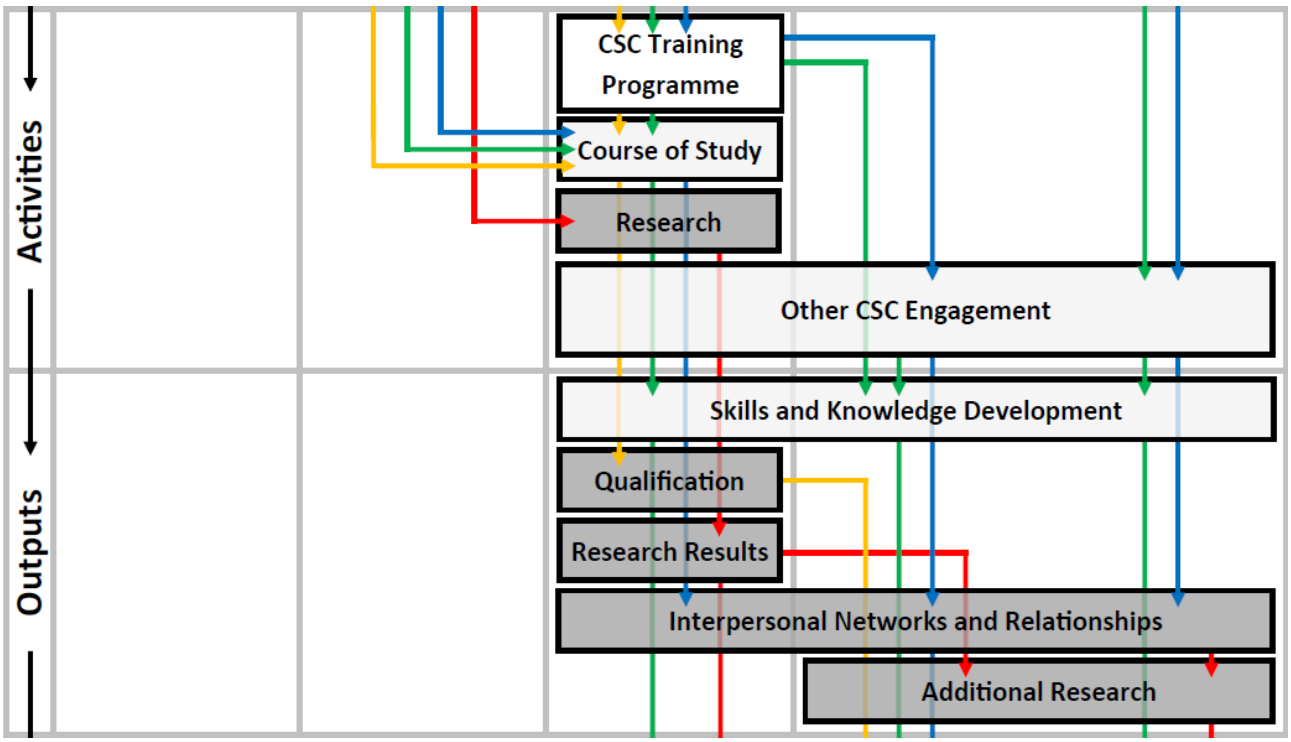
CSC Development Training Programme

Introduction

The CSC Development Training Programme is a suite of training activities offered to Scholars by the CSC Engagement Team during their Scholarship. These activities aim to develop and enhance Scholars' soft skills and knowledge in areas crucial to their academic and career development, ultimately helping them contribute to developmental outcomes and impacts.

The centrepiece of this programme is the CSC's online course, 'Understanding Development Impact,' hosted on FutureLearn and developed by the CSC in collaboration with experts in online pedagogy and development studies from the Open University. The primary goals of the course are to introduce Scholars to the CSC community and the various resources available to them, provide an introduction to the main concepts and issues in the sustainable development sector, and teach tools that can aid their work, including stakeholder mapping and PEST analyses. The course is made available to all new Scholars at the beginning of their Commonwealth Scholarship.

Figure 11 – CSC Development Training Programme



FROM: [Commonwealth Scholarship Commission], University Partners
INTO: Course of Study, Other CSC Engagement, Skills and Knowledge Development

Scholars are also offered several other training opportunities throughout their Scholarship, targeting specific topics identified as crucial enablers for their post-study career activities. These topics have been selected based on feedback from Scholars and Alumni about the skills they feel are necessary for career success. Training provided by the CSC covers areas such as grant writing, employability skills, and research communication.

It is assumed that Scholars have internet access and a device to access the online course. This assumption is reasonable as Scholars are either based in the United Kingdom during their study or engaged in an online learning degree as part of their Scholarship. The course is also designed to be accessible to Scholars with low bandwidth or intermittent internet access. It is also assumed that Scholars will sign up for and participate in the course. While uptake and completion rates were high at the introduction of the course, not all Scholars participate and the rates have declined over time, possibly due to Scholar's time constraints, low awareness, or lack of interest.

Additionally, it is assumed that the smaller training sessions and workshops are appropriately targeted, providing critical development opportunities for a subset of Scholars. For example, research-oriented workshops are vital for doctoral Scholars and those pursuing research careers but are less relevant for those entering the NGO sector. However, the range of training sessions ensures that there are opportunities for everyone to further develop their skills.

Analysis

In the 2022-23 academic year, feedback was collected from five training sessions conducted for Scholars. These sessions were:

- **Leadership Models and Decision Making**: An introduction to leadership models and frameworks, and the application of these models to potential real-life scenarios.

- **Mastering Networking**: Developing networking skills and engaging in networking conversations with others to apply these skills.
- **Preparing for Social Impact**: Mapping attendees' impact to the Sustainable Development Goals.
- **Research Project Management**: Sharing research, intellectual property concepts, and principles of project management.
- **Writing for Development**: Development concepts and principles and how they apply to research.

Scholars who participated in these sessions were asked to rate each session and report on how well each session met their expectations. Attendees gave positive responses across all five sessions. All attendees reported that overall, they found the session to be either 'Good' (23%) or 'Very Good' (77%). All attendees also felt that the events either matched their expectations (49%), exceeded their expectations (32%), or greatly exceeded their expectations (19%).

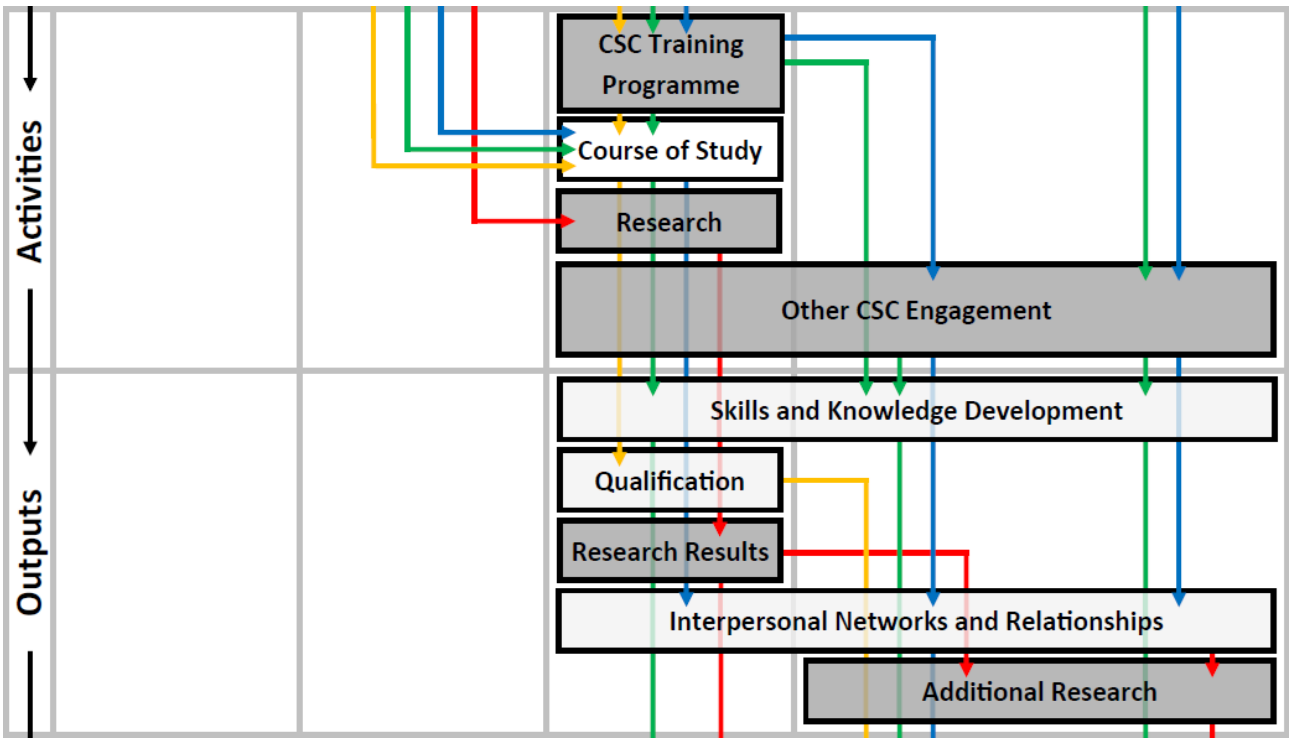
The 2023/24 Leaders for Sustainable Development Training Programme questionnaire also collected feedback from attendees of the CSC's most recent Development Training Programme workshops. The questionnaire assessed three key elements: the understanding and awareness of the various programme elements, the overall quality of the workshops, and the impact of the training programme. Scholars who attended the workshops rated the quality of the trainer on a scale of 'Very good' to 'Very poor'. Of the 12 Scholars who responded to this question, 10 rated the trainer as 'Very Good', with the remaining two Scholars ranking them 'Good'. Scholars were also asked to rank the usefulness of the workshop in relation to their development impact. Almost all (10) Scholars found the workshop to be 'Very useful', with the remaining two indicating it was 'Useful'. However, while this feedback is positive, the low number of respondents means that it should be taken cautiously and additional data would help to give a more comprehensive picture.

Course of Study

Introduction

The Course of Study is the primary focus of learning during a Commonwealth Scholarship, and the associated fees for these studies are normally the largest cost component of the programme. The Course of Study is provided by University Partners in the United Kingdom at either the Master's or Doctoral level, depending on the particular scheme.

Figure 12 – Course of Study



FROM: University Partners
INTO: Skills and Knowledge Development, Qualification, Interpersonal Networks and Relationships

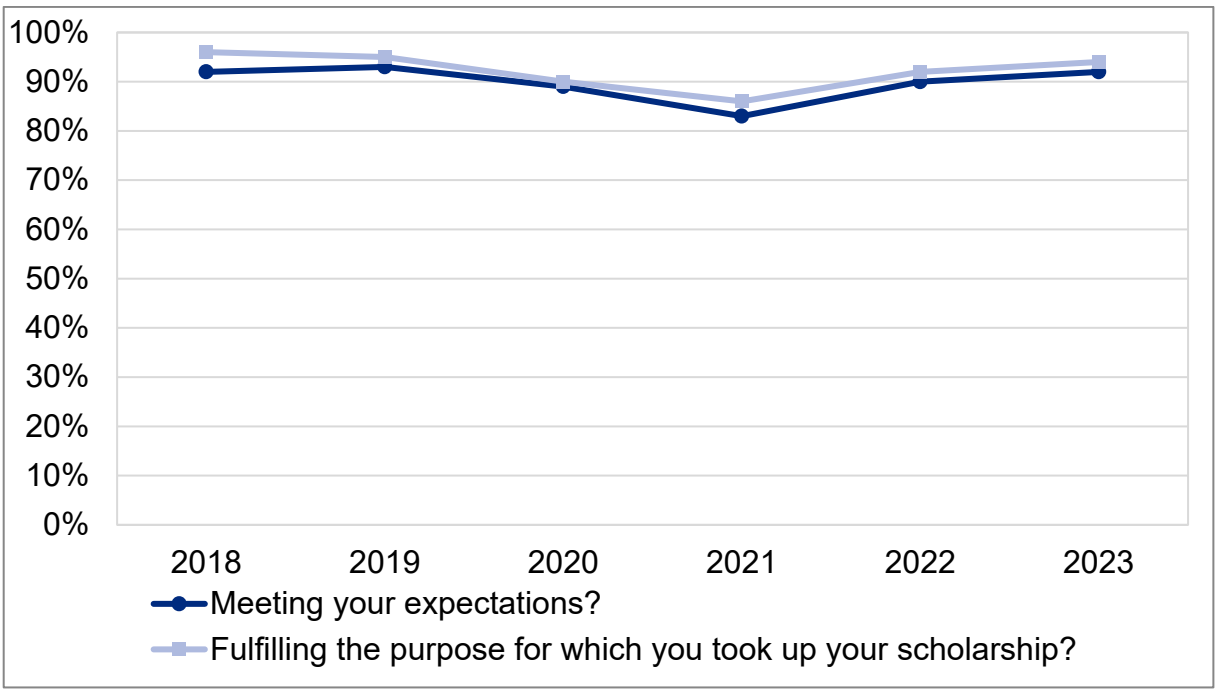
For this component of the Theory of Change, the assumption is that Scholars will fully engage with their studies, acquire the expected skills and knowledge, and receive a relevant qualification. It is also assumed that the course of study or research will be offered as planned. The CSC supports these assumptions by actively and routinely monitoring the progress of Scholars and working closely with their host institutions from selection through to the completion of their awards.

Analysis

Study Experience in the UK

In the Scholar Experience Survey, Scholars were asked to report on the extent their UK study experience met their expectations, fulfilled the purpose for which they took up the Scholarship, and to rate the standard of their academic experience. Figure 13 indicates that over 80% of the respondents believe that their UK study experience has either ‘Mostly’ or ‘Completely’ met their expectations as well as fulfilled the purpose of the scholarship. The trend for the overall quality of the standard of academic experience reflects similar pattern, with consistently above 90% satisfaction from respondents throughout the years 2018 to 2023.

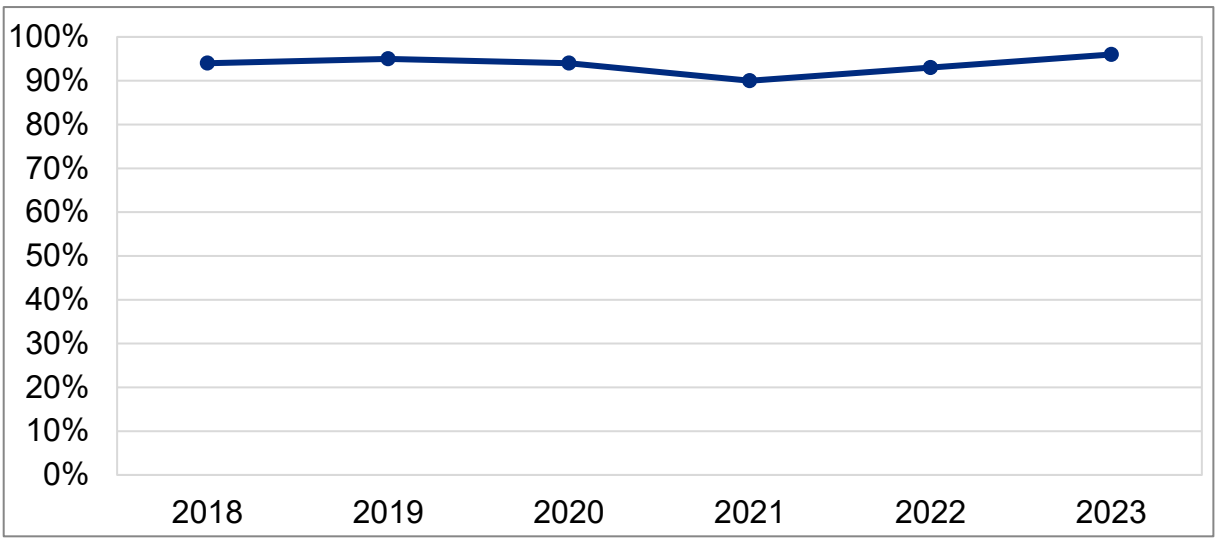
Figure 13 – Study Experience in the UK – 'Mostly' or 'Completely'



Source: Scholar Experience Survey 2018-2023

All of the three variables shown in Figure 13 and 14 show downward trends around the time the Covid-19 pandemic began to impact the world, reaching the lowest point in 2021, coinciding with strict lockdowns in the UK and globally. However, the line charts recover after 2021, reaching above 90% in 2023 indicating that whilst the pandemic may have had a detrimental effect on the Scholar's experience at the time, the situation improved rapidly once the effects of the pandemic were mitigated.

Figure 14 – Academic Experience in the UK – 'Excellent' or 'Good'



Source: Scholar Experience Survey 2018-2023

Violet Tampiooru Gomba, a Commonwealth Scholarship Alumni who was awarded in 2018 to study for a Master's degree in Genomic Medicine at St George's University of London, was driven by her passion to become a refined molecular geneticist and medical researcher, so that when she returned to her home country, Nigeria, she could effectively contribute to improving the healthcare and educational needs in Nigeria. In her application for her Scholarship, she wrote:

‘The courses taught in this programme will train me in genomic technologies, genetic basis of cancer, inherited and infectious diseases, interpretation of genomic data, counselling and research skills. This will grant me the privilege of learning from research, clinical and laboratory scientists as the Master’s programme is affiliated with NHS hospitals.’ [23]

Figure 15 shows the words that appeared most frequently when Scholars were asked if they had any additional comments relating to their academic experience. Notable frequent words include ‘research’, ‘learning’, ‘work’, ‘support’, and ‘great’, showing that Scholars’ academic experiences are delivering on the expectations such as those articulated by Violet in her application.

Figure 15 – Word Frequency, ‘Do you have any additional comments relating to your academic experience?’

Source: 2023 Scholar Experience Survey

Speaking to the impact that their exposure to the quality of education had, particularly access to resources and equipment in the UK, Babajide Milton Macaulay, a Commonwealth Scholarship Alumni from 2012 who undertook a Master’s degree in Sustainable Environmental Management at the University of Greenwich, was inspired to implement a process he had observed during his studies to make equipment more available to researchers in his home country:

[23] Commonwealth Scholarship Commission, *Improving Access and Inclusion in Health Services for Disadvantaged Rural Communities and Tackling Youth Unemployment in Nigeria*.

‘Having experienced a digitalised process of accessing research equipment at the University of Manchester, I transferred a similar idea upon my return to Nigeria to resolve the problem of poor access to research equipment by creating Wadi.’[24]

He also developed a platform for others to access international scholarships so that they could have the types of academic experiences he had:

‘Having won multiple international scholarships including the Commonwealth Scholarships for my Master’s and PhD degrees, I was inspired to create iLLUMANIA to help African proteges access international scholarships to fund their career dreams.’[25]

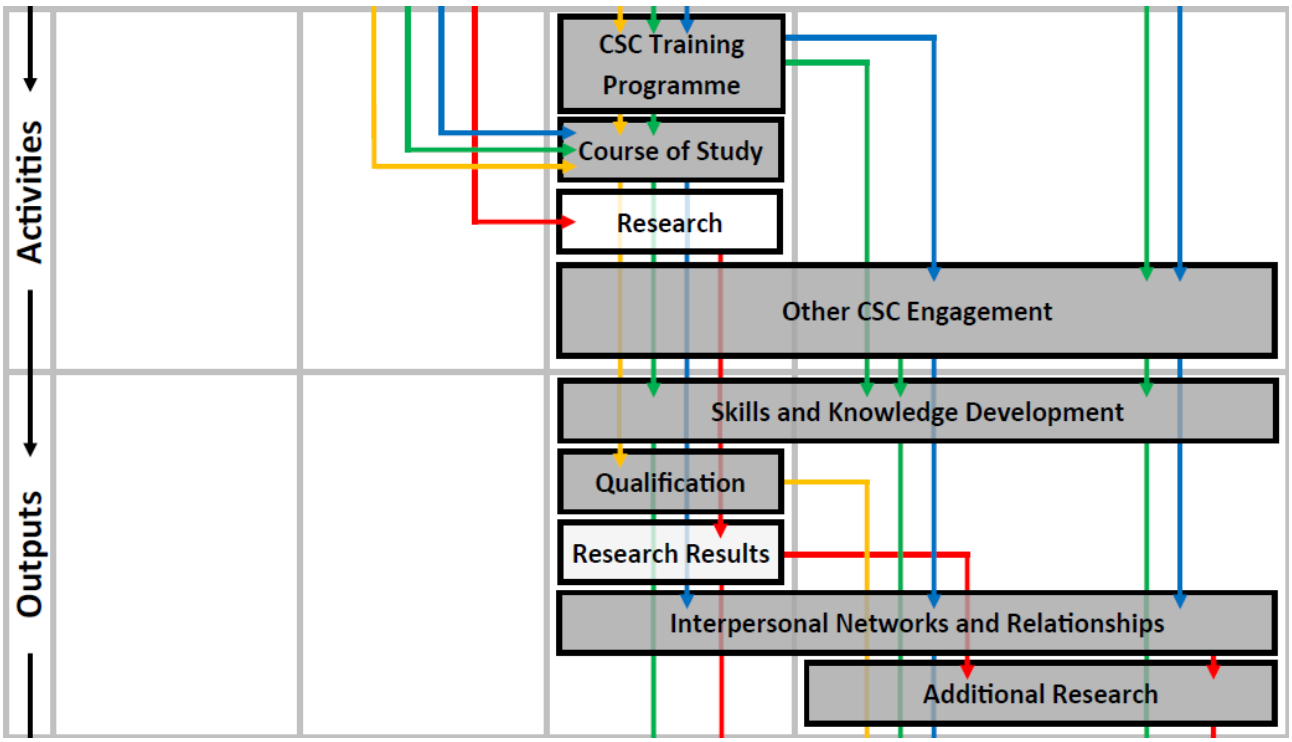
Research

Introduction

A significant activity that Commonwealth Scholars engage in during their Scholarship is research, particularly for those in the Doctoral and Split-site programmes. For these Scholars, their area of research is the core component of their application, and they are selected largely because they can demonstrate the link between the proposed research and its potential sustainable development impact. This connection is further illustrated in the red Research path in the Theory of Change, where the application of the research findings leads to a sustainable developmental impact (discussed below).

[24] Commonwealth Scholarship Commission, *Tackling Medical Waste in Nigeria and Widening Access to Tertiary Education*.
[25] Ibid

Figure 16 – Research



FROM: University Partners
INTO: Research Findings

Again, it is assumed that for this component of the Theory of Change, the Scholar will be able to undertake their research as planned or that any changes will have equal potential for later developmental impact. It is also assumed that the necessary resources will be available, and that the Scholar will be able and willing to undertake the research required to obtain their desired qualification. These assumptions are validated through routine monitoring of the progress of Scholars, and by working closely with supervisors and institutions during the Scholar's study period.

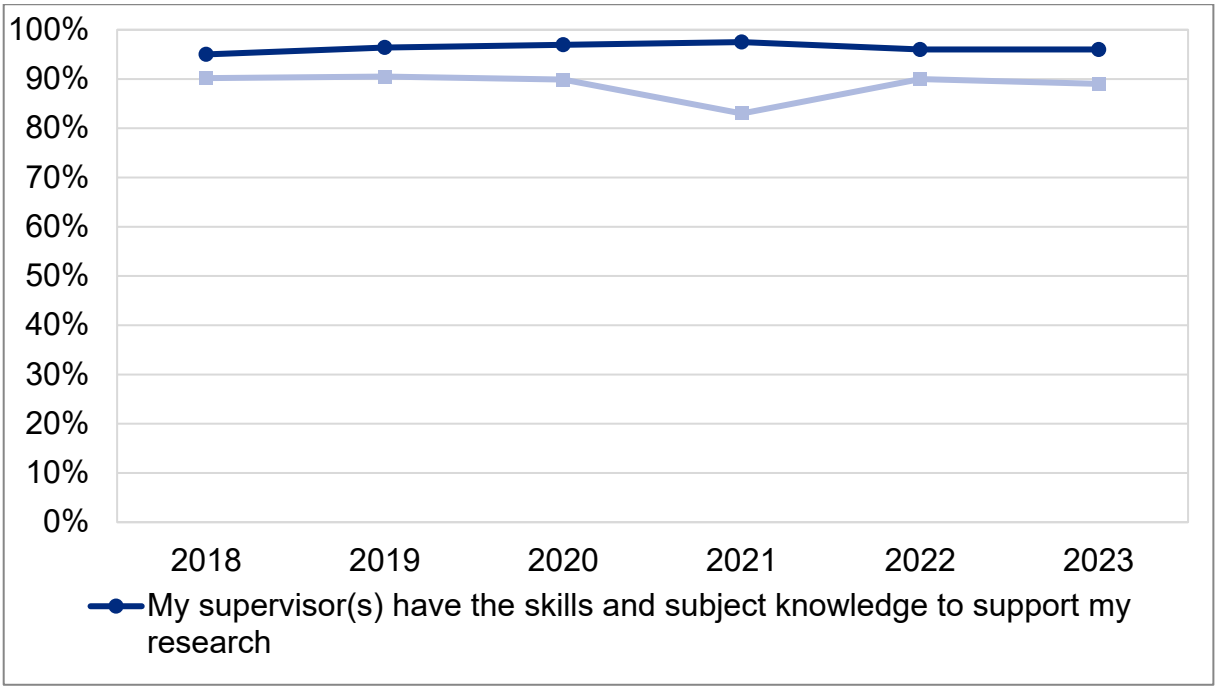
Analysis

Research Support in the UK

The CSC collects feedback on the quality of support provided by supervisors and the research infrastructure environment (facilities and equipment) that Scholars require to achieve their academic and research goals. As shown in Figure 17, more than 95% respondents have consistently reported that their supervisor(s) 'Definitely' or 'Mostly' had the skills and subject knowledge to support their research. In terms of the specialist resources, respondents required during the award to complete their research word successfully, again, 90% reported that they were 'Definitely' or 'Mostly' able to access specialist resources.

The only exception is data point from 2021, likely attributed to the Covid-19 pandemic, which prevented Scholars from accessing labs and other specialised equipment due to lockdown and other restrictions.

Figure 17 – Access to academic support and research infrastructure and facilities – 'Definitely' or 'Mostly'



Source: Scholar Experience Survey

Other CSC Engagement

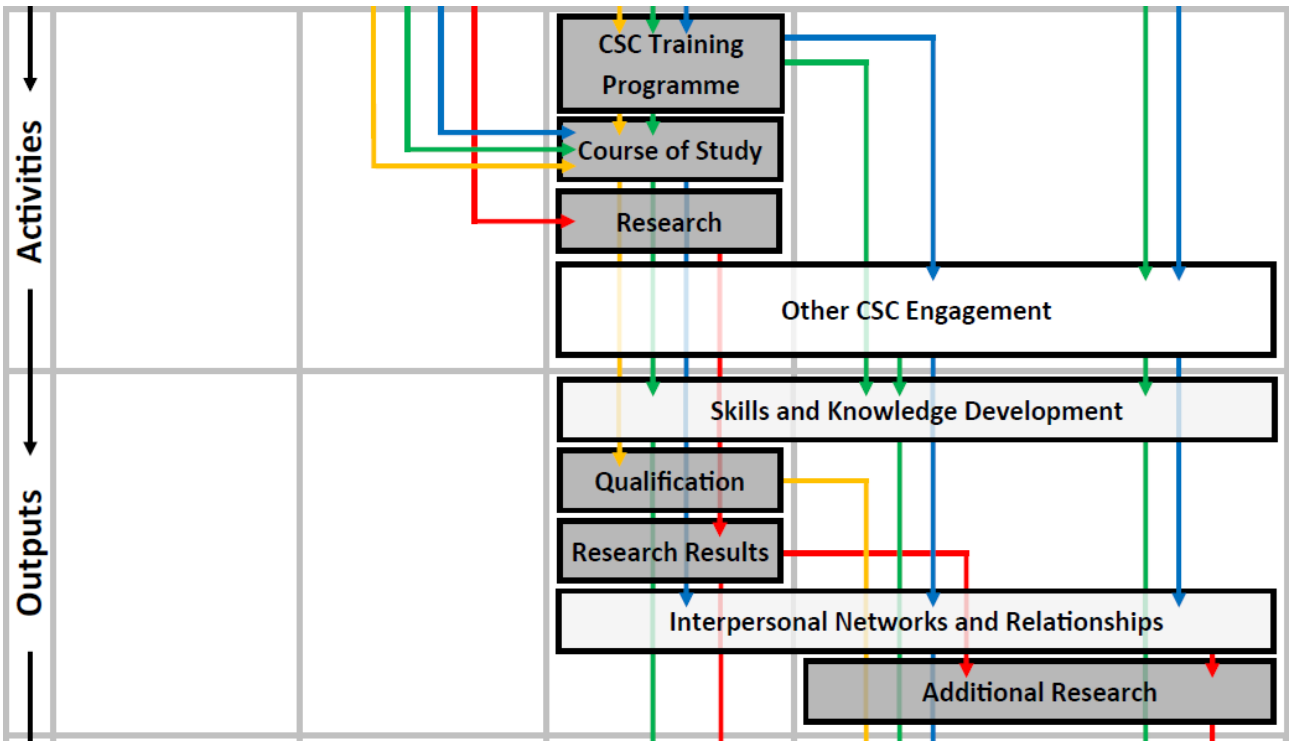
Introduction

In addition to the CSC Development Training Programme, the CSC offers Scholars and Alumni a variety of other resources through the Alumni and Engagement teams. These resources include networking, learning, and career development opportunities across the CSC community.

The CSC provides opportunities for Scholars and Alumni to network through Regional Networks during their scholarship, and previously through the CSC Knowledge Hubs and social media groups on Facebook and LinkedIn during and after their awards. In-country Alumni events also facilitate networking post-scholarship. The CSC Knowledge Hubs offer Scholars and Alumni opportunities to learn from each other, as do Alumni 'Development in Action' webinars, the Best Journal Article Prize (BJAP), and Common Knowledge (the CSC Alumni magazine).

Additionally, Alumni are provided with a wide range of career development resources (beyond those offered by the Development Training Programme) through the Alumni Resources section of the CSC website. These resources include job-seeking support and a list of external funding opportunities that Alumni can apply for.

Figure 18 – Other CSC Engagement



FROM: Commonwealth Scholarship Commission, CSC Development Training Programme
INTO: Skills and Knowledge Development, Interpersonal Networks and Relationships

It is assumed that Scholars and Alumni remain engaged and active participants in the CSC Community. This is checked through the frequent monitoring of engagement levels and by regularly soliciting feedback from Scholars and Alumni.

Analysis

As part of their engagement activities, the CSC's Alumni Team offers webinars under the Development in Action series. This monthly webinar series provides Commonwealth Alumni with the opportunity to present their work and its contribution to sustainable development, as well as to learn from other alumni about their research and actions. From December 2022 to November 2023, 612 Commonwealth Alumni attended at least one of these webinars, with hundreds more viewing the recordings afterwards.

Attendees are asked to complete an evaluation survey to reflect on the content of the webinars and measure the success of the programme. Overall feedback was very positive; of those who responded, 100% indicated that they would attend another Development in Action webinar in the future. Furthermore, 95% of attendees indicated that they had learned something new to a 'Large' (53%) or 'Moderate' (42%) extent.

The CSC also runs a mentoring programme which pairs new Commonwealth Scholars with Commonwealth Alumni working in a related field of work to provide advice and guidance during their Scholarship.[26] Since its creation the programme has been very popular, and in 2022-23 there

[26] "Mentoring Programme", Commonwealth Scholarship Commission in the UK, accessed 24 July 2026, https://cscuk.fcdo.gov.uk/alumni/mentoring-programme/.

were 174 mentor-mentee pairs. Mentees have reflected positively on the value of the programme to their career development, with one Mentee highlighting:

> 'I'm finding the CSC Mentoring Programme very essential for my academic and personal development. Apart from discussing academic matters, my Mentor and I often discuss career and professional development matters, set goals, and constantly evaluate them.'[27]

Summary and Analysis

The components featured in the Activities section of the Theory of Change largely revolve around activities that take place during the Scholarship, with the exception of alumni activities which continue to provide opportunities for Scholarship recipients to learn and network after their studies.

The evaluation data that the CSC holds in relation to its Development Training Programme suggests a generally very positive view of the sessions offered, with Scholars indicating that the quality of the sessions was high and that the training met or exceeded their expectations. However, compared to other elements of work, the CSC has a limited amount of evaluation data in this area. The Theory of Change specifically links the training offered to Scholars to the application of skills and knowledge they learn through this training to alumni's post-graduate careers. Whilst the data collected demonstrates the quality of the training, the CSC does not currently hold evidence that demonstrates a link between these sessions and post-scholarship development impacts. Therefore, whilst the initial results are encouraging, further investigation and evidence targeted towards this component of the Theory of Change is needed.

In relation to the Course of Study, the data collected indicates that the vast majority of Scholars hold a positive view of their UK study experience. Across all survey years, there is robust evidence to demonstrate that Scholars felt that the academic experience met their expectations and fulfilled the purpose for which they took up the scholarship. Scholars also consistently rated the overall standard of their academic experience very highly.

The evidence in this section clearly indicates that the Covid-19 pandemic had a measurable impact on the quality of the Scholar's academic experience; across nearly all metrics, satisfaction scores fell in 2020 and 2021 when the pandemic was at its peak. It is worth noting that the Theory of Change stipulates the assumption that the course of study will be offered as planned, and the global pandemic caused major disruption to the delivery of many courses. However, as the pandemic receded, satisfaction scores returned to their pre-pandemic levels, suggesting that under normal circumstances the Course of Study is delivering as postulated by the Theory of Change. Given that this section focuses on Scholars' on-award study experience, there is no equivalent counterfactual cohort to compare to for metrics in this section. The evidence in this section is therefore not complemented by a comparable control group.

[27] Ibid.

The evidence collected in relation to the Research section primarily focuses on the support that Scholars received whilst conducting their research. There is strong evidence to suggest that the vast majority of Scholars were happy with the scope and quality of the support they received with respect to their research activities. Respondents provided positive feedback both in relation to the skills and knowledge of their supervisor, and their access to the specialist resources they needed for their research. However, the nature of the evidence that the CSC collects in relation to this measure means that there is no equivalent counterfactual cohort against whom the Scholars can be compared.

Finally, the evidence held by the CSC suggests a very positive view of the other engagement activities offered by the Commission. In particular, there is strong evidence to suggest that the Development in Action programme is well-received by participants. However, the lack of longitudinal data in this area is a weakness of the analysis, and the evidence for this component in the Theory of Change is therefore relatively weak compared to other areas.

Section Three: Outputs

Introduction

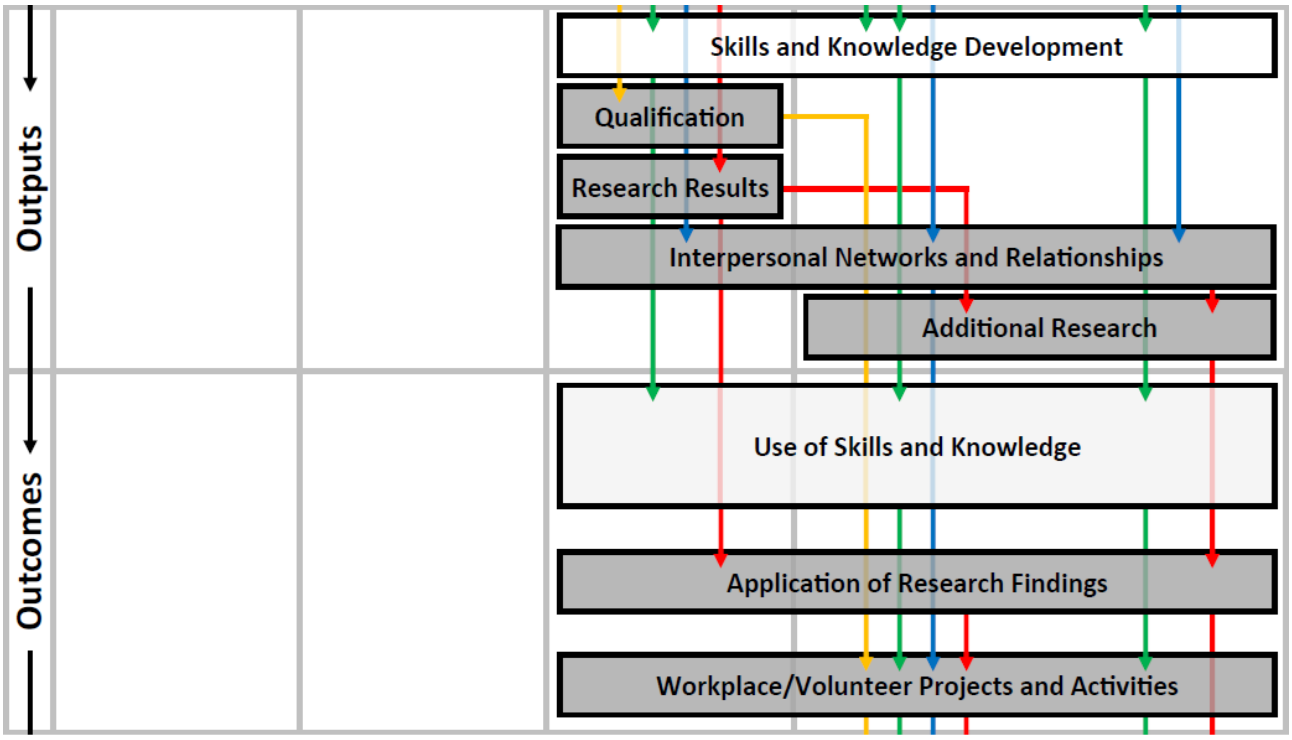
The Outputs in the Theory of Change are the immediate results of intervention activities, such as scholars gaining a qualification or producing research findings. These Outputs not only reflect the programme's impact but also serve as a foundation for subsequent short- and medium-term Outcomes.

Skills and Knowledge Development

Introduction

The development of Scholars' skills and knowledge is a key output of the Commonwealth Scholarships programme. This occurs through their Course of Study, the CSC Development Training Programme, and other CSC Engagement activities. Together, these experiences equip Scholars with subject expertise and soft skills to navigate the complexities of sustainable development.

Figure 19 – Skills and Knowledge Development



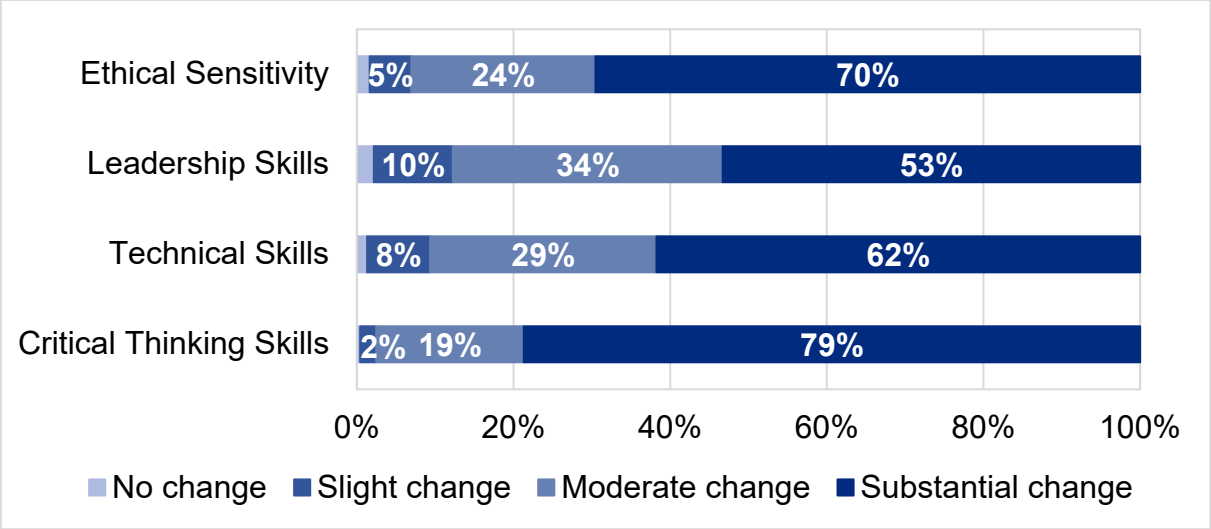
FROM: CSC Development Training Programme, Course of Study, Other CSC Engagement
INTO: Use of Skills and Knowledge

It is assumed that Scholars will engage with additional training opportunities offered by the CSC during and after their Scholarship. The CSC monitors this through engagement levels, Scholar feedback, and reports from University Partners on Scholar progress. Most Scholars participate in the Online Development Module, including Distance Learners, with consistently high engagement. Likewise, the majority complete their studies on time and earn their qualifications.

Analysis

Alumni were asked to report the change they experienced in their skills related to critical thinking, technical abilities, leadership, and ethical sensitivity using a Likert scale. A majority indicated a substantial change across all four areas, with the highest proportion of change reported to critical thinking (79%) and ethical sensitivity (70%), while the lowest was in leadership (53%). Over 60% of respondents reported a substantial change in their technical skills.

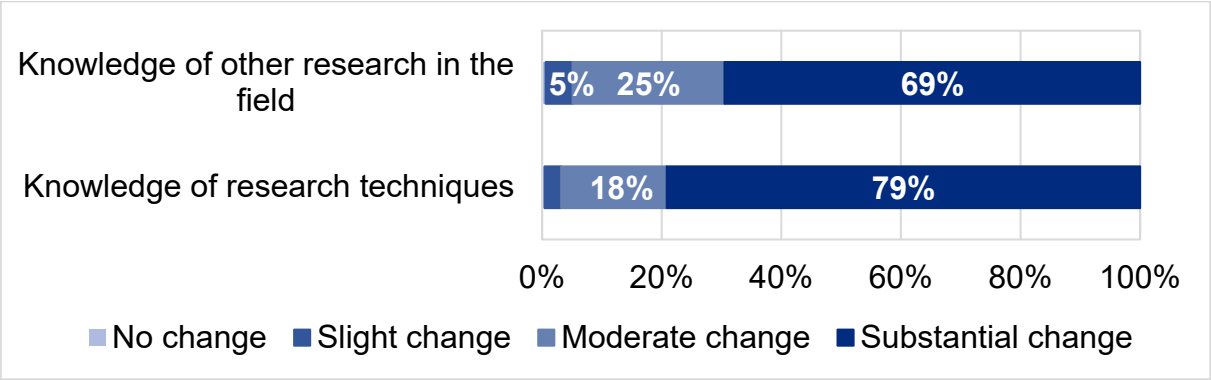
Figure 20 – Skills related to critical thinking, technical skills, leadership abilities, and ethical sensitivity



Source: Longitudinal Alumni Survey 2018-2023

Respondents were asked to assess how the Commonwealth Scholarship enhanced their knowledge of research techniques and other research in the field. Figure 21 shows that nearly 80% reported a 'Substantial change' in their research techniques knowledge, compared to 69% for other research in the field.

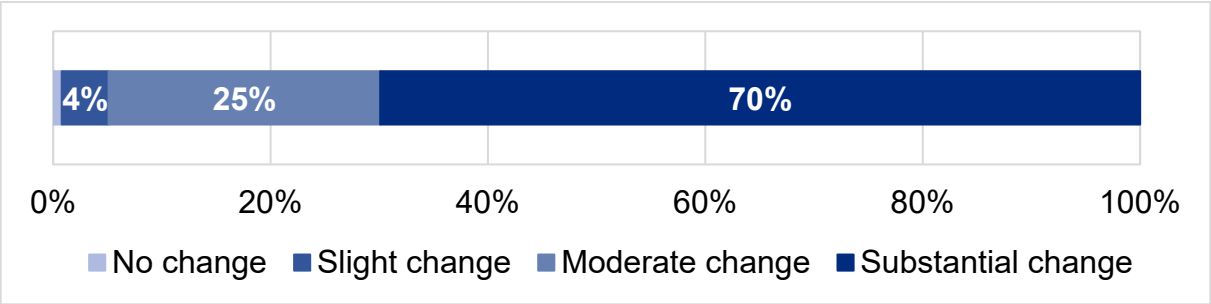
Figure 21 – Knowledge of research techniques and other research in the field



Source: Longitudinal Alumni Survey 2018-2023

Alumni were also asked to report on how much the Scholarship changed or enhanced their ability to disseminate knowledge, measuring their confidence in communicating information clearly and effectively. Most respondents reported that this was the case with 70% reporting a 'Substantial' change in their ability to disseminate knowledge, with another 25% reporting a 'Moderate change'. These results indicate that the vast majority of Scholars graduate with both specialist knowledge and confidence in sharing that knowledge.

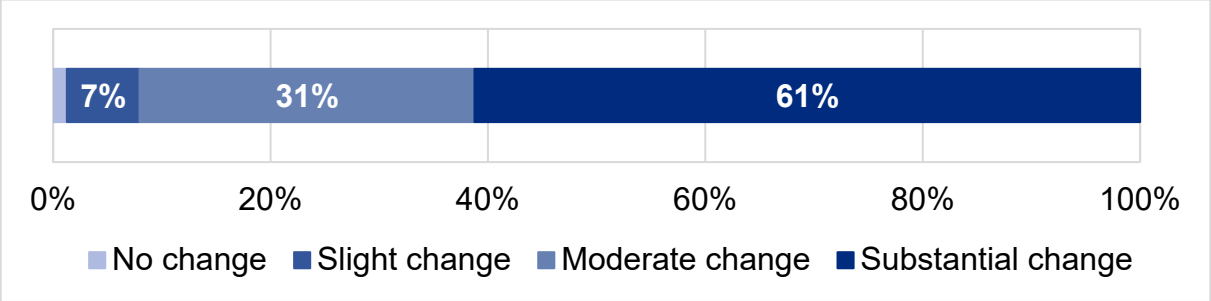
Figure 22 – Capacity to disseminate knowledge



Source: Longitudinal Alumni Survey 2018-2023

Alumni were also asked to report on the level of change they experienced in their capacity to influence decisions, which closely relates to the development of leadership skills mentioned earlier. This question assesses alumni's readiness to confidently apply their skills and knowledge to advocate for positive change in their workplaces. In terms of influencing decisions, 61% reported a 'Substantial change', while 31% reported a 'Moderate change'.

Figure 23 – Capacity to influence decisions



Source: Longitudinal Alumni Survey 2018-2023

Overall, a strong majority of respondents perceived a 'Substantial' or 'Moderate' change in their knowledge and skills in research ethics, critical thinking, technical skills, leadership and decision-making, and knowledge sharing. In contrast, fewer than 2% of respondents reported 'No change' in these areas, highlighting the consistent and reliable development of skills and knowledge among Commonwealth Scholarship recipients. These results provide strong supporting evidence for this element of the Theory of Change, demonstrating that most Commonwealth Scholars have experienced significant knowledge and skill development.

Reflecting on the impact receiving their Commonwealth Scholarship had on them, Femi Adekoya, a Commonwealth Alumnus who graduated in 2019 with a Master's degree in Integrated Pest Management from Harper Adams University, described the impact of the Scholarship on their work:

'[The] Commonwealth Scholarship was hugely impactful on my life and career. I have noticed that the prestige attached to the Scholarship has opened doors for me, with many people being more willing to hear me out once they know I am a

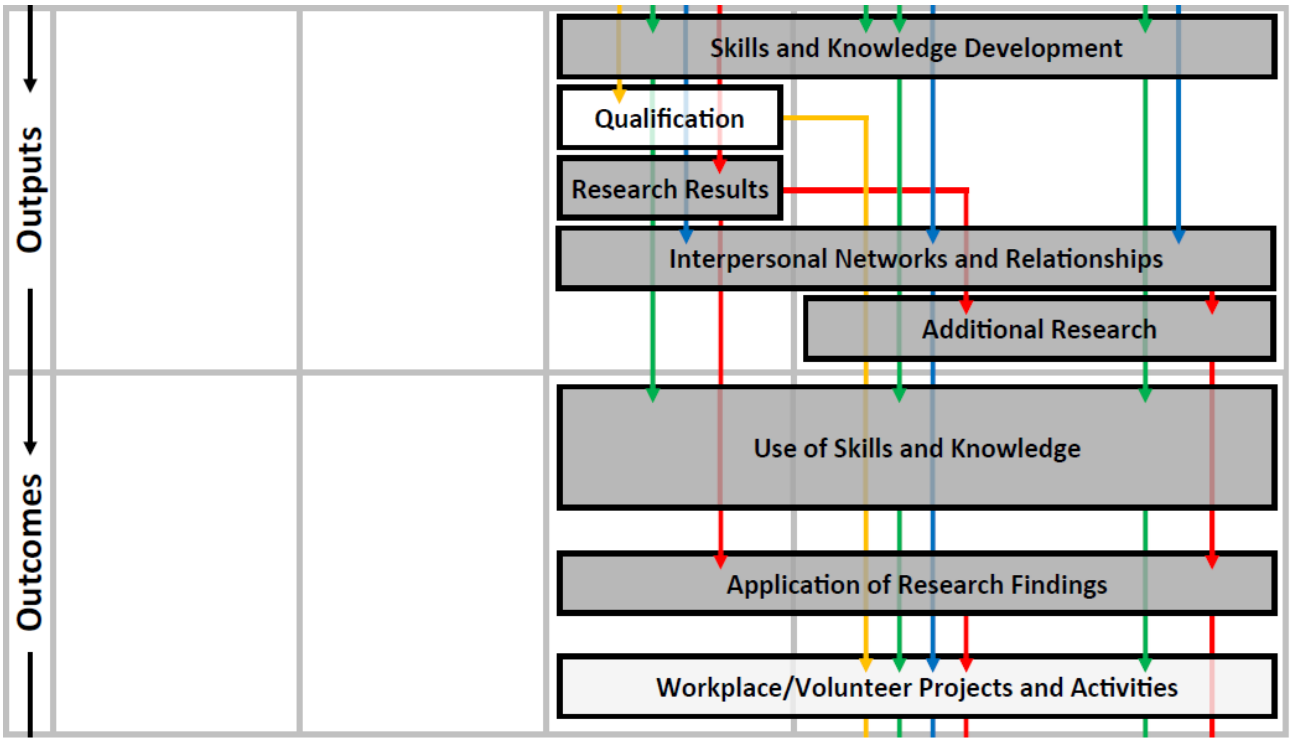
Commonwealth Alumnus … I would say it this way: the Commonwealth Scholarship is the foundation for virtually 80% of what I do today.' [28]

Qualification

Introduction

The Qualification earned by Scholars upon completing their studies is the second of the four primary outputs and the most formal outcome of the Commonwealth Scholarship programme. Depending on their programme, Scholars receive either a Master's or Doctoral degree from their institution, reflecting the skills and knowledge gained with the support of their Scholarship.[29] While the degree symbolises the learning, personal development, and research undertaken during their studies, Scholars have also reported that it provides increased respectability and authority among peers and co-workers, empowering them to advocate for and implement change in their workplaces and communities.

Figure 24 – Qualification



FROM: Course of Study
INTO: Workplace/Volunteer Projects and Activities

As noted previously, it is assumed that Scholars will complete their degree programme, be awarded the relevant qualification, and return to suitable employment to apply their skills. The CSC

[28] Commonwealth Scholarship Commission, *Transforming Nigerian Agriculture through Practice, Advocacy, and Education*.
[29] The one exception is Commonwealth Distance Learning Scholars who can choose to exit their programme at an earlier stage with a different qualification such as a Post Graduate Diploma or Certificate if they feel this best meets their career aspirations.

monitors Scholars' programme completion through qualification reports provided by University Partners and collects data on post-scholarship employment via the Longitudinal Alumni Survey.

Analysis

Regarding the Qualification section of the Theory of Change, completion rates are the most direct measure of success. Although the CSC does not have completion data for all its awards dating back to 1960, it does hold this information for the majority of them, however this section reviews the completion rates which are currently publicly available.

Completion rates – PhD Scholars

According to the review of the Doctoral Scholarship published in 2017, among the PhD Scholars for whom the CSC has completion data, the majority successfully completed their studies and obtained a Doctorate (87%), while only a small fraction (3%) did not complete their degree. The remaining Scholars either obtained a lower qualification or their results are still pending.[30]

Completion rates – Distance Learners

On average, just under 60% of Commonwealth Distance Learning Scholars successfully completed the programme with a Master's degree (based on the period 2002-2016).[31] However, the Distance Learning scheme is unique among the CSC's Scholarship programmes in that it offers Scholars the option to exit with a certificate or diploma instead of the full degree. In these cases, the Scholar's funding ends, and they are recorded as having successfully completed the programme with a lower qualification. Between 2002 and 2016, an additional 16% of Scholars chose this route.[32]

Research Results

Introduction

The third primary output of the Commonwealth Scholarship programme arises from Scholars' research activities during their Scholarship, specifically the Research Results they produce. These findings stem from the research plan included in their application and any adjustments made throughout their research and in consultation with their supervisor. The findings are typically published in the form of a dissertation and, in some cases, also in journal articles. However, it is important to recognise that the Research Results serve as an intermediate step between Scholars' studies and both Additional Research and the practical Application of their Research Findings.

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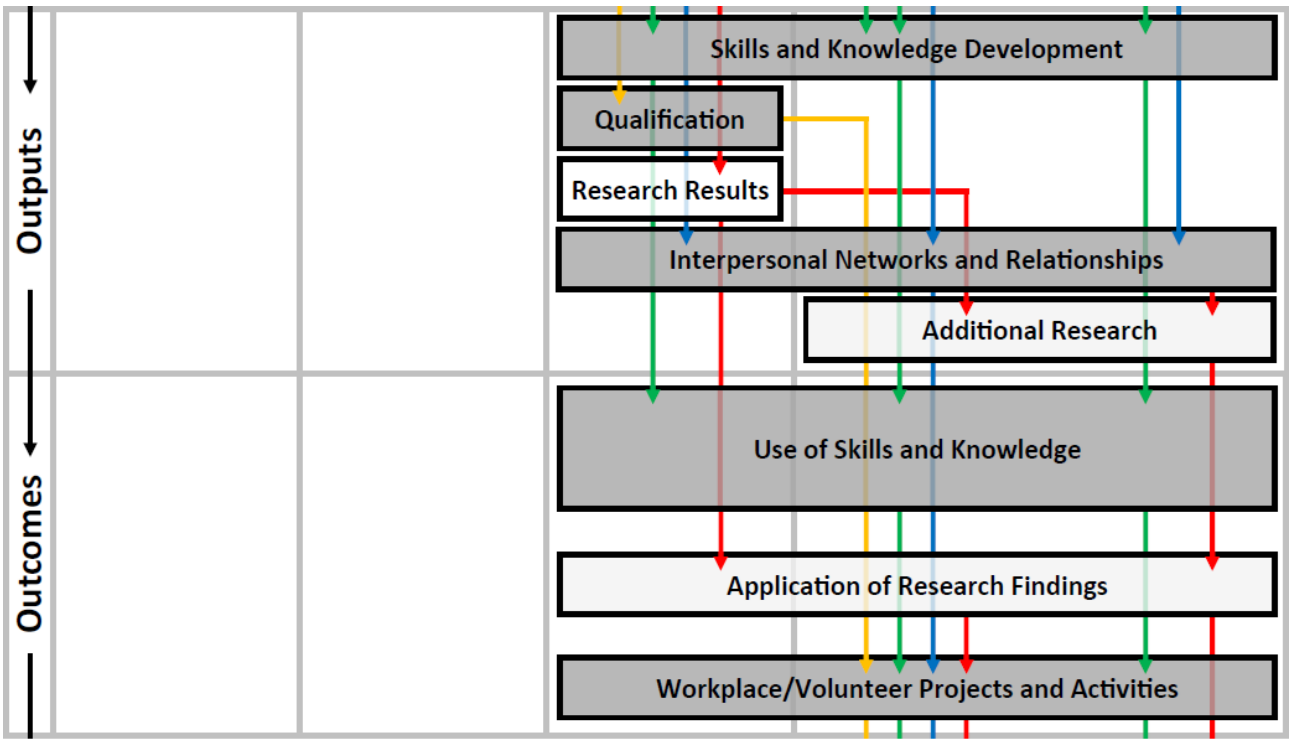
[30] Day et al, *Commonwealth Doctoral Scholarship 1960 – 2015*, 26-27.
[31] Harrison et al, *Expanding Horizons: The Commonwealth Distance Learning Scholarship Programme*, 73-74.
[32] Ibid.

Figure 25 – Research Results



FROM: Research
INTO: Additional Research, Application of Research Findings

Analysis

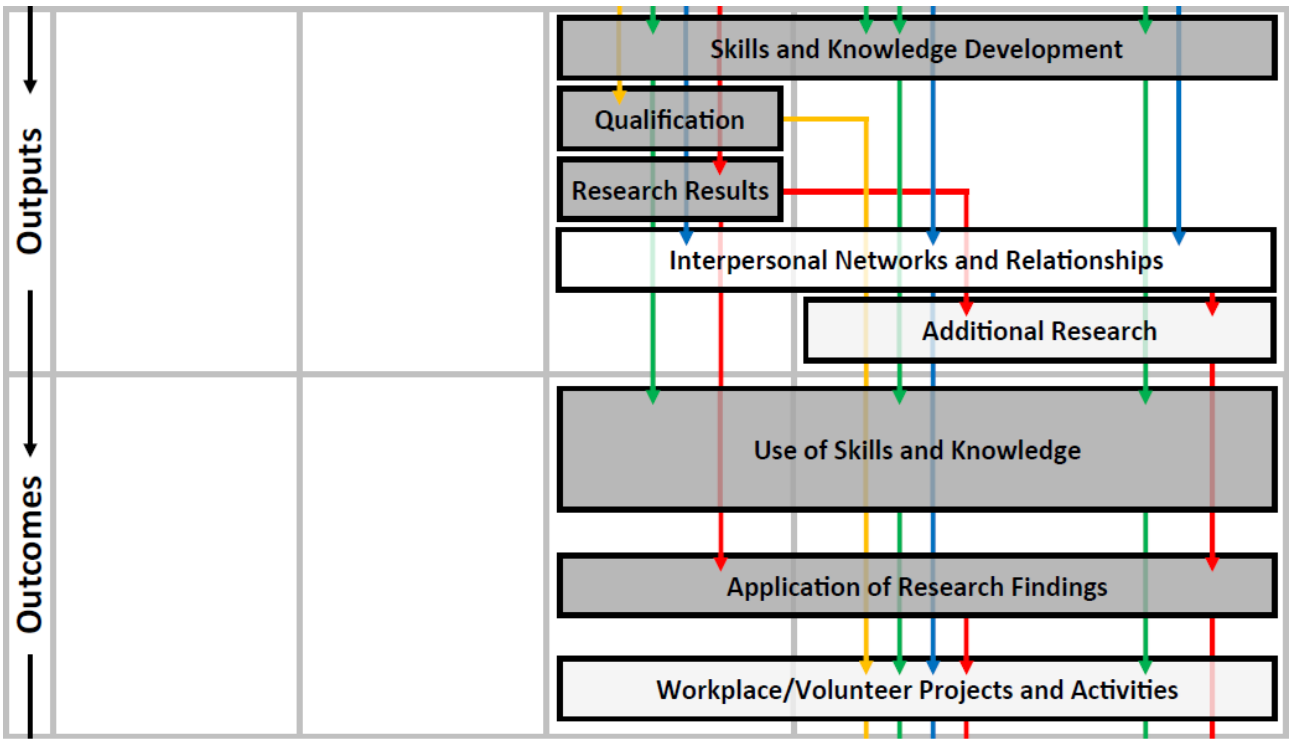
Reflecting on the two years immediately prior to the survey, respondents were asked to report how often their research activities were directly related to work conducted during the Commonwealth Scholarship. This question was asked from the two-year mark onwards. At year two, the vast majority of Alumni (88%) reported that their work was directly related to their Scholarship 'All the time' or 'Often'. In contrast, only 12% reported that their work was 'Rarely' or 'Never' related to their Scholarship. Results remained consistent throughout the follow-up period, with the proportion of Scholars answering 'All the time' or 'Often' never dropping below 85%.

Interpersonal Networks and Relationships

Introduction

The fourth and final primary output of the Commonwealth Scholarship programme is the Interpersonal Networks and Relationships built and strengthened during Scholars' study periods. Scholars establish these networks with various parties, including other Commonwealth Scholars, fellow students, university lecturers and researchers, and members of the UK general public, all of whom may become collaborators for Additional Research or Workplace/Volunteer Projects and Activities. Additionally, the CSC provides Scholars with opportunities to network with a broader audience through events, including UK Parliamentarians, representatives of High Commissions, and members of professional bodies. The CSC also involves Scholars in events hosted by partner organisations to maximise and diversify their networking opportunities.

Figure 26 – Interpersonal Networks and Relationships



FROM: [CSC Development Training Programme], Course of Study, Other CSC Engagement
INTO: Additional Research, Workplace/Volunteer Projects and Activities

The networks and relationships Scholars build with individuals and organisations in the United Kingdom also play a key role in the soft power outcomes of Commonwealth Scholarships, strengthening bilateral relationships between the United Kingdom and Scholars' home countries. These connections can further facilitate the formation or strengthening of partnerships between institutions or organisations in the UK and Scholars' home countries, as well as between Commonwealth countries.

It is assumed that Scholars will be willing and able to maintain these networks over time. Based on responses to the Longitudinal Alumni Survey, this appears to be largely the case. While there is some decline in the frequency of contact with certain types of connections, overall the data suggests that Scholars continue to maintain these networks.

Analysis

This section examines the frequency of interactions reported by Scholarship recipients and the Counterfactual group with different types of contacts they may have cultivated. The graphs present combined proportions of the top two responses to these questions ('All the time' and 'Often') to simplify the visualisation of the time-lapse analysis.

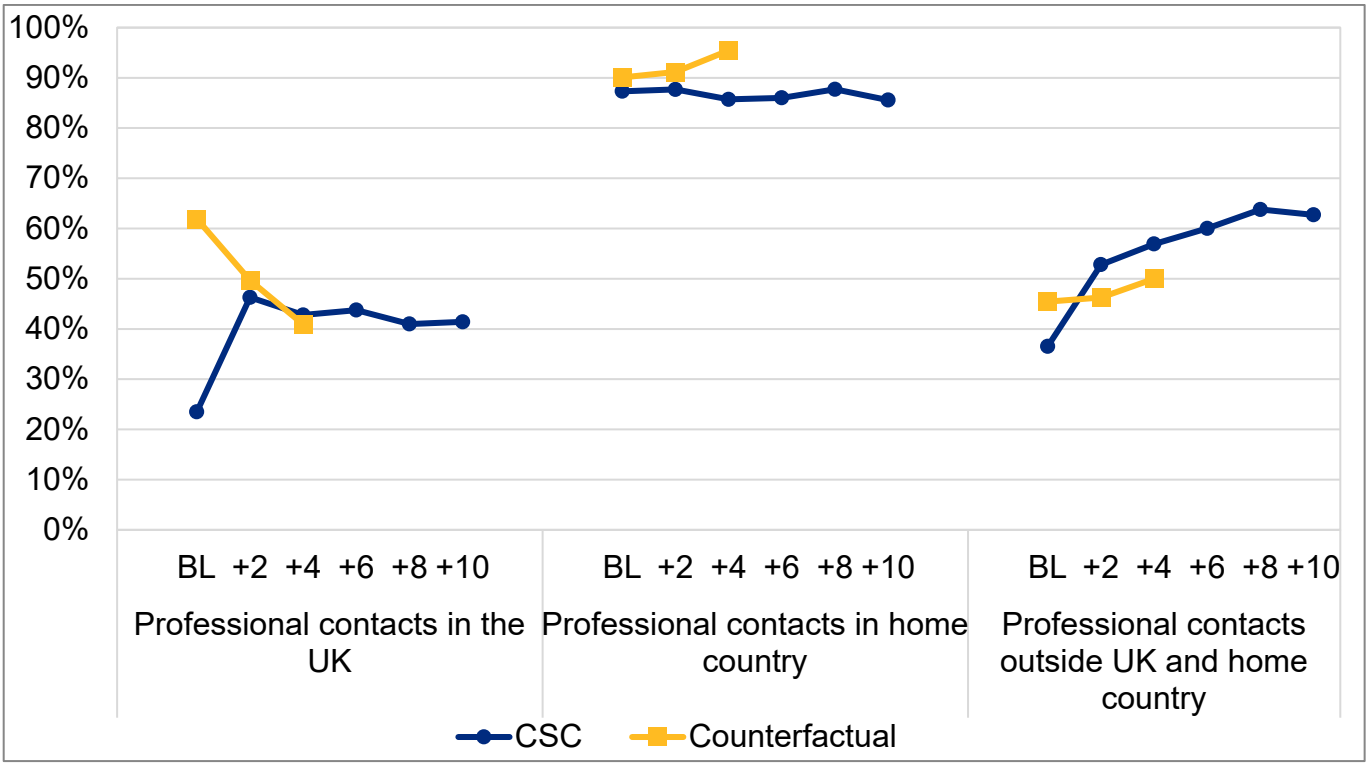
Professional Contacts

Overall, the respondents have reported an increase in their frequency of interaction ('All the time' or 'Often') with professional contacts in the UK and other countries excluding their home country between the Baseline and two-year mark. As seen in Figure 27, the interaction between alumni and their professional contacts in the UK shows an initial surge between the Baseline (24%) and the two-year mark (46%), with a slight gradual decline to 41% by the ten-year mark. The trend for the respondents' interactions with international contacts that reside outside the UK and their home

countries also sees a sharp increase between the Baseline (37%) and the two-year mark (53%) and continues upward until peaking at 64% at the eight-year mark (64%). These trends suggest that the Commonwealth Scholarship experience has played a pivotal role in developing Scholars' professional networks by expanding their exposure to international contacts.

When it comes to the frequency of interaction ('All the time' or 'Often') with professional contacts in their home country, the Alumni group demonstrated stable levels of interaction, with little variation from the Baseline through to the ten-year period. In contrast, the Counterfactual group reported slight increases in their interactions with professional contacts in their home country, rising from 90% at the Baseline to 91% at the two-year mark and 95% at the four-year mark post-application. Overall, the Counterfactual group reported higher levels of interaction with professional contacts in their home country compared to the alumni group. This difference may be attributed to alumni relocating to their country of study, whereas applicants who did not receive a Scholarship were more likely to remain in their home country, providing greater opportunities to maintain or strengthen local professional contacts.

Figure 27 – Level of interaction with professional contacts in the UK, the home country, and other countries – 'All the time' or 'Often'



Source: Longitudinal Baseline Survey; Longitudinal Alumni Survey; Counterfactual Baseline Survey; Counterfactual Follow-up Survey

Academic Contacts

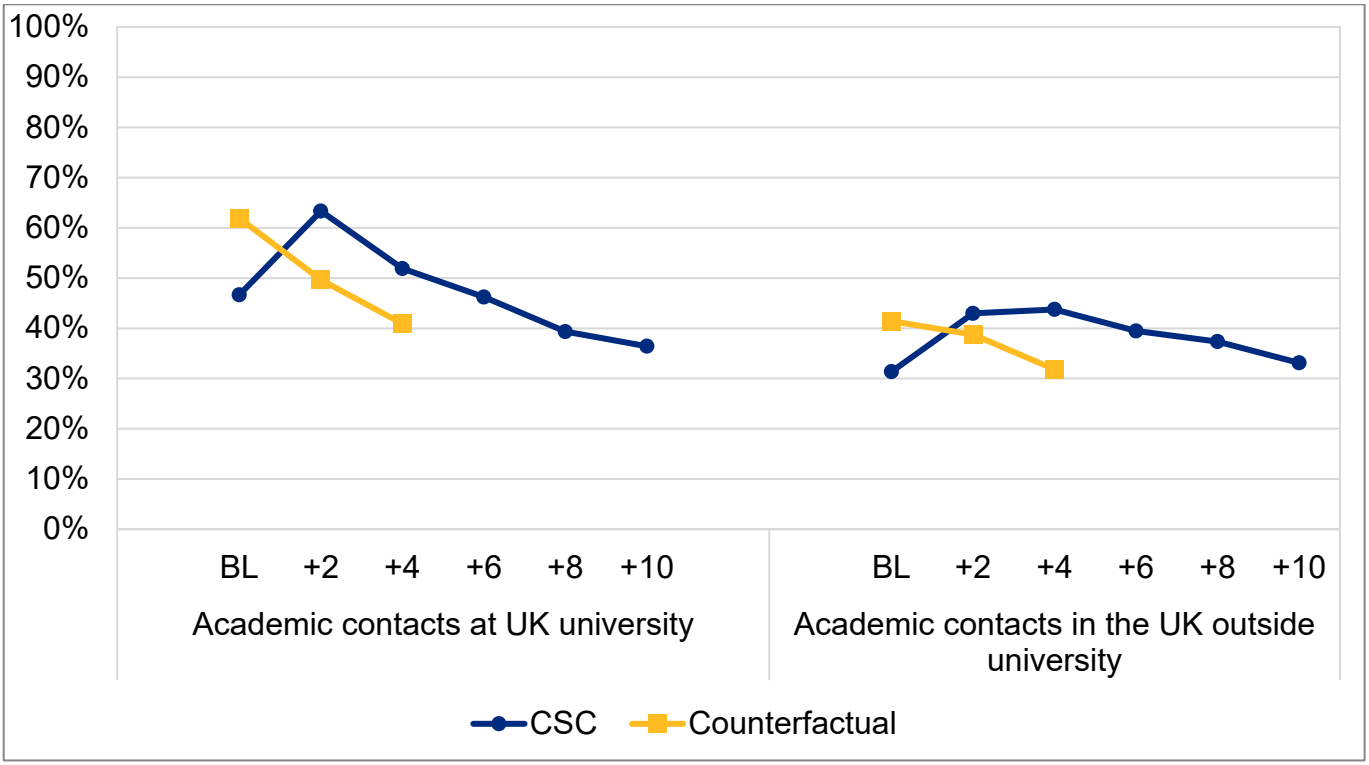
With respect to interactions with the academic contacts at the host university and outside of it in the UK, the alumni have mirrored the trends shown for the overall interaction with the professional contacts in the UK (Figure 27). The proportion of alumni who have reported interaction with their academic contacts at both the host university and outside of it in the UK either 'All the time' or 'Often' saw strong rises from the Baseline and peaked at the two-year mark. This trend might be an illustration of the role the Scholarship played in developing and strengthening interactions between

the Scholars and their academic contacts in the UK universities, although this increase does dissipate over time.

This trend contrasts with that reported by the Counterfactual group, which demonstrates a continual downward trend from the Baseline to the four-year mark for both their interaction with academic contacts based at the university of choice selected at their scholarship application and other institutions in the UK. For instance, while Figure 28 shows that more than 60% reported high levels of interaction with their academic contacts at their university of choice at the Baseline, it dropped to just above 40% reporting the same levels at the four-year mark.

These trends, however, validate the trends observed in Figure 27 where, overall, the Counterfactual group has reported a downward trend in their interactions with the contacts in the UK, while the alumni have reported a sharp increase between the Baseline and the two-year mark and then a gradual decline as the reporting period progresses towards the ten-year mark.

Figure 28 – Level of interaction with academic contacts based at the host university and in the UK outside the host university – 'All the time' or 'Often'



Source: Longitudinal Baseline Survey; Longitudinal Alumni Survey; Counterfactual Baseline Survey; Counterfactual Follow-up Survey

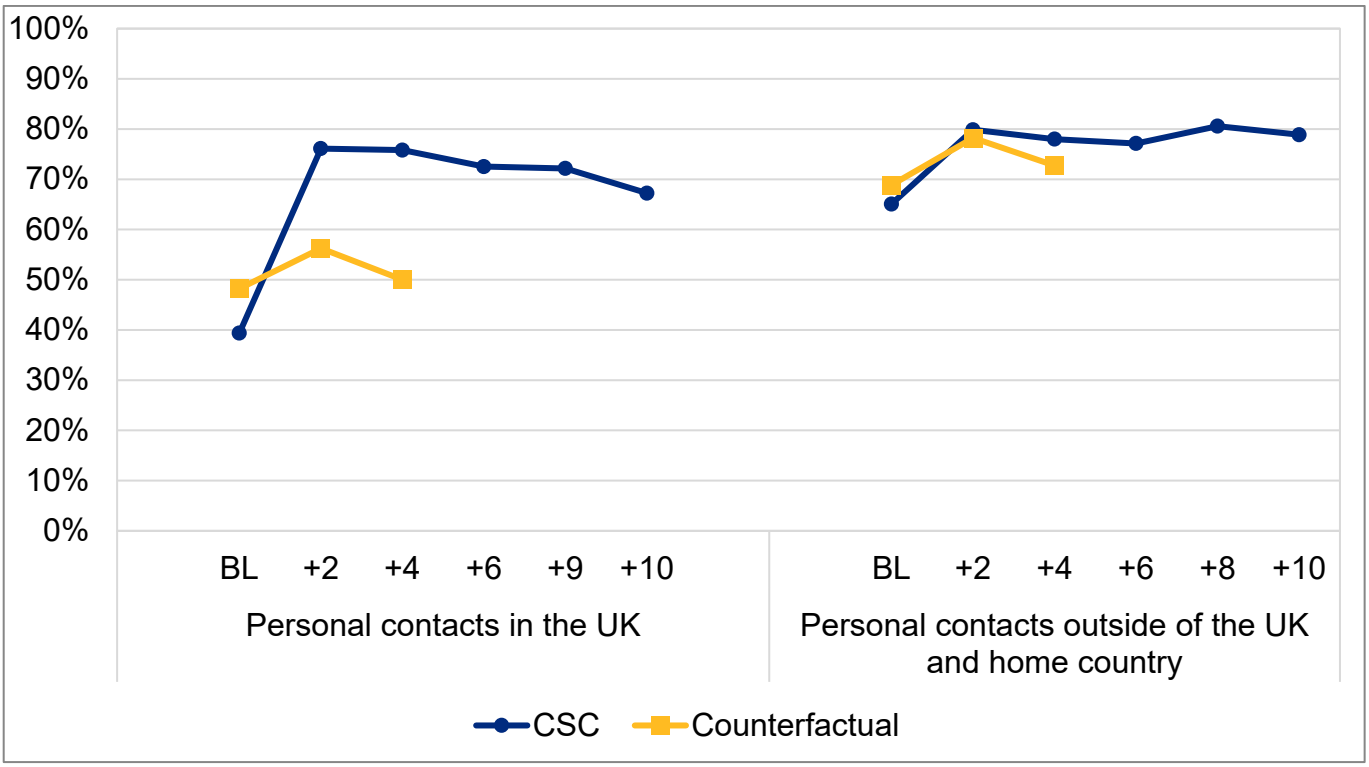
Personal Contacts

When it comes to the frequency of interactions with personal contacts in the United Kingdom and those outside the UK and home country, a substantial increase is observed in the proportion reporting they interacted 'All the time' or 'Often' with these contacts (see Figure 29). The percentage between the Baseline and the two-year mark nearly doubles for interactions with contacts in the UK while for outside the UK and home country there is also a strong increase.

For the Counterfactual groups, there were slight increases from the Baseline to the two-year mark. However while the increase was roughly similar for personal contacts outside of the UK and home

country, the change for personal contacts in the UK is significantly smaller compared to the Alumni group suggesting that the Scholarship played an important role.

Figure 29 – Level of interaction with personal contacts in the UK, and outside of the home country and the UK – 'All the time' or 'Often'

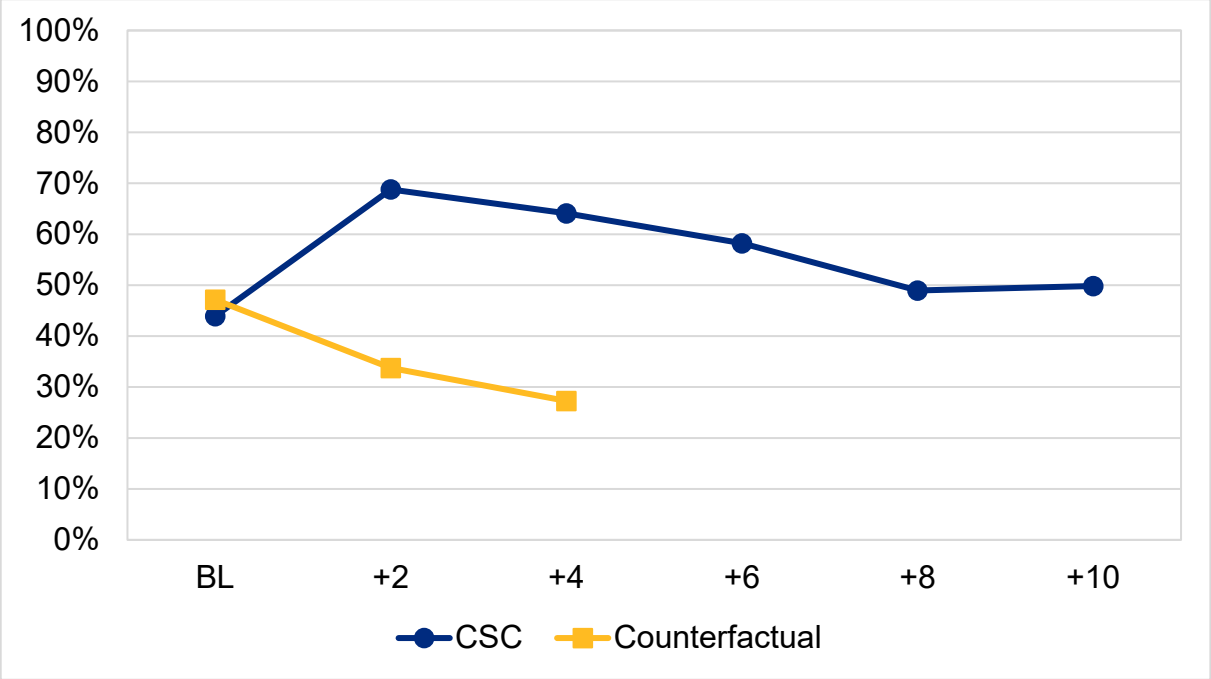


Source: Longitudinal Baseline Survey; Longitudinal Alumni Survey; Counterfactual Baseline Survey; Counterfactual Follow-up Survey

Contact with Commonwealth Scholars or Alumni

Finally, the level of interaction with Commonwealth Scholars or Alumni ('All the time' or 'Often') was reported by a similar proportion of Scholarship recipients and the Counterfactual group at the Baseline (44% and 47%, respectively). Understandably, the level of interaction with Commonwealth Scholars or Alumni decreased after application in the Counterfactual group while rising after the Baseline survey to reach 69% at the two-year mark for the recipient group. A significant 37% gap still remains between the two groups at the four-year mark. Half of alumni respondents (50%) still reported frequently interacting with Commonwealth Scholars or Alumni at the ten-year mark.

Figure 30 – Level of interaction with Commonwealth Scholars or Alumni – 'All the time' or 'Often'



Source: Longitudinal Baseline Survey; Longitudinal Alumni Survey; Counterfactual Baseline Survey; Counterfactual Follow-up Survey

Scholars were also given the opportunity to provide additional comments about how they have made use of these networks in their professional or personal lives, with 1,620 Scholars providing feedback. Within these comments, the most frequently mentioned themes were 'Networking' (14%) and 'Professional' (11%), followed by 'Receptiveness' and 'Alumni', each at 8%. Those coded with 'Networking' and 'Professional' focused primarily on how the Scholarship helped to establish professional contacts, and how these have benefited and continue to benefit their career and growth. Many acknowledge that without the Scholarship, they would not have these professional contacts and networks, and all the support provided through them.

For example, studying at Harper Adams University opened a new world of opportunity for Femi Adekoya, who was able to connect and collaborate with like-minded colleagues who were also studying and working at the school. In his case study, Transforming Nigerian Agriculture through Practice, Advocacy, and Education, he highlighted the benefit of building relationships during his Commonwealth Scholarship:

'I met my co-founder, this perfect I call a partner, because I was awarded a CSC Scholarship to study in the UK. We have steered the Agritech startup, Integrated Aerial Precision, to new heights with several awards such as the Eco-innovation in Technology Award, Orange Corner Innovation Fund Grand Prize award by the

Kingdom of Netherlands (40,000 Euro Financial Aid), +1 Global Food Security Award (12,000 USD Grant) and many more.'[33]

Those who mentioned 'Receptiveness' revealed that the Scholarship helped them to become more open and respectful to other people's cultures and views and that it helped to broaden their intellectual and professional horizons as well as their worldview more generally. Some said that they learnt to view issues from different perspectives, acknowledging the experiences of others and learning from them, and opening their mindset as a result.

Respondents who commented on 'Alumni' related activities mentioned that they joined alumni associations which supported continuous learning, helped share information and discussed matters of importance in the relevant sector. They reflected that alumni networks helped to promote their publications and campaigns, supported them in designing the strategic direction of their organisation, helped with mentoring other scholars, and were a source for information on funding.

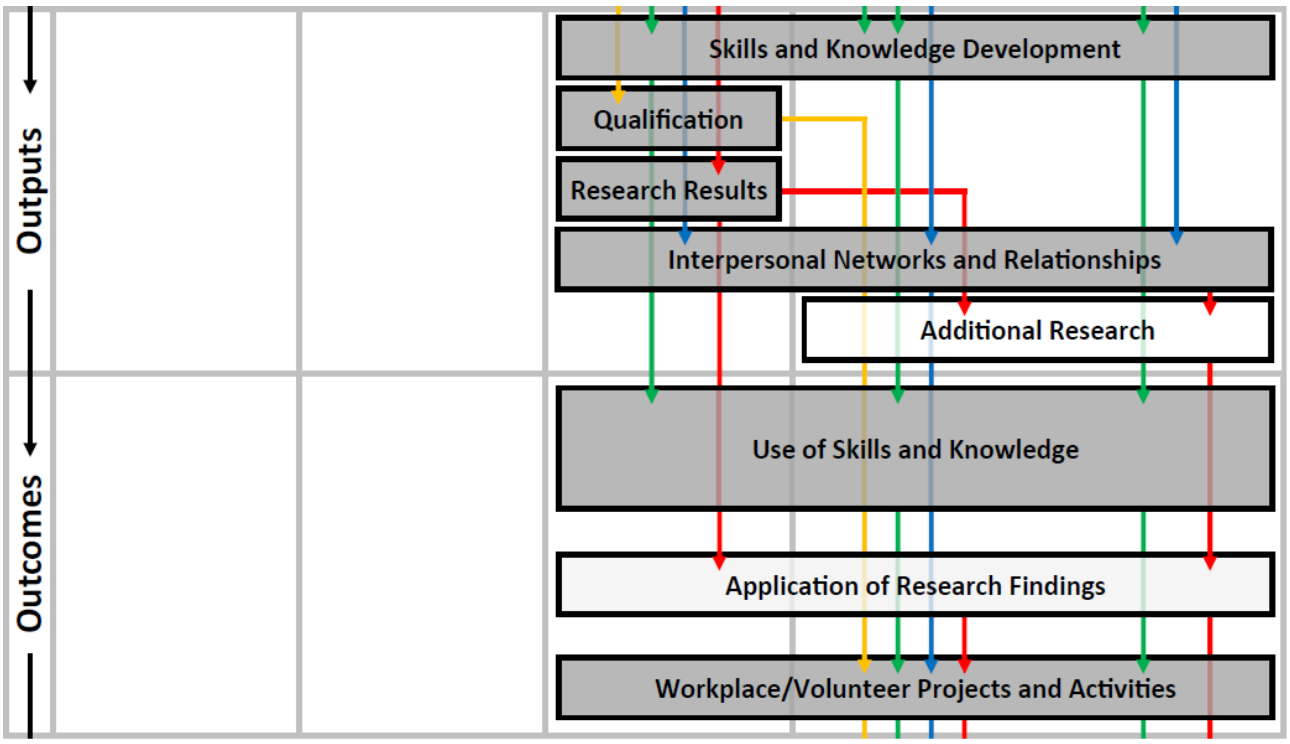
Additional Research

Introduction

Additional Research is a key follow-on activity from the Research Findings Scholars develop during their Scholarship. As research is an iterative process, new questions or lines of inquiry often emerge during the original research that can be further explored. This Additional Research can then lead to further Applications of Research Findings. However, it is important to recognise that this Additional Research depends on the work done during an alumni's Scholarship and may not have occurred without that initial research.

[33] Commonwealth Scholarship Commission, *Transforming Nigerian Agriculture through Practice, Advocacy, and Education*.

Figure 31 – Additional Research



FROM: Research Findings, Interpersonal Networks and Relationships
INTO: Application of Research Findings

It is also important to note that a key assumption related to the Additional Research component is that Scholars can secure funding to continue their research after becoming alumni. This has been identified as a significant barrier that Alumni must overcome to pursue further research. The CSC seeks to address this challenge by offering grant writing workshops as part of the Leaders for Development training programme and by signposting resources through the alumni website. Alumni's ability to continue their research is monitored through the Longitudinal Alumni Survey.

Analysis

This section examines whether the Recipients and Counterfactual groups have held responsibility for conducting academic research in their most recent employment. Overall, approximately 60% of Scholarship recipients reported having held responsibility for conducting academic research in their most recent role, with this figure remaining consistent across all follow-up surveys. In contrast, the proportion of the Counterfactual group conducting academic research declined from the Baseline to the two-year mark. While there was a slight increase between the two- and four-year mark, the line did not recover to the Baseline level.

It is notable that across all data collection points with comparable data, a higher proportion of Counterfactual respondents reported responsibility for conducting academic research. However, the chi-squared test of independence revealed no significant association between the award of the Scholarship and the responsibility for conducting academic research at both the two-year and four-year marks.

Participants were asked how often in the last two years, their academic research activities were directly related to work they conducted during their Commonwealth Scholarship. This question is a key indicator, as it illustrates the extent to which Alumni's research careers build on the research conducted during their studies. The data shows that across all follow-up periods, the proportion of

alumni reporting that their academic activities were related to their Scholarship ‘Often’ or ‘All the time’ remained above 85%. This suggests that, for the vast majority of Commonwealth Alumni, the Scholarship laid the foundation for the research they continued to conduct after completing their award.

International Collaborations

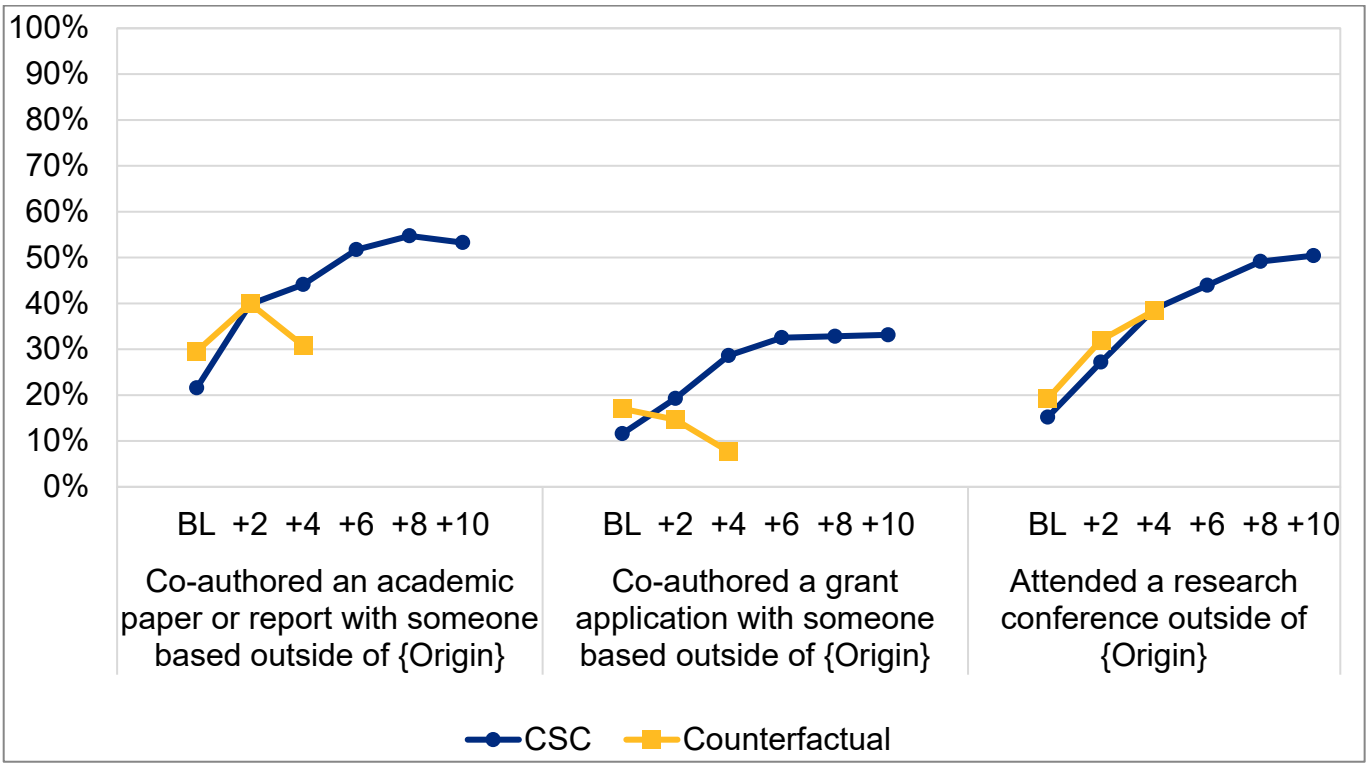
Participants were asked how often they had co-authored an academic paper or report with someone based outside their country of origin within the last two years. The focus of this section is particularly on the nature of research activities that were conducted in collaboration with contacts based outside of the alumni and counterfactual respondents’ country of origin. For information specifically about collaborative activities, regardless of whether they were conducted internationally, nationally, or locally, see the Research Activities subsection below.

At the Baseline, 22% of alumni reported collaborating internationally ‘Often’ or ‘All the time’, compared to 30% of counterfactual respondents. By the four-year mark, this trend had reversed, with 44% of alumni responding ‘Often’ or ‘All the time’ compared to 31% of Counterfactual respondents. Among the Alumni group, the proportion reporting co-authorship showed a positive trend from the Baseline to the eight-year mark.

Participants were also asked how often they had co-authored a grant application with someone based outside their country of origin within the last two years. This measure is particularly significant for assessing alumni’s capacity to conduct further research, as securing funding is a major barrier to continued research activities. The trends observed for the two groups differ substantially as among alumni, engagement in co-authoring grant applications continually increased until the six-year mark and then stabilised. Conversely, Counterfactual respondents showed a consistent decline in engagement levels from the Baseline to the four-year mark.

Finally, participants were asked how often they had attended a research conference outside their country of origin in the last two years. Trends over the follow-up years indicate a steady increase in conference attendance among both alumni and counterfactual groups, with similar proportions of each group reporting this from the Baseline to the two-year mark.

Figure 32 – International collaboration in research including co-authorships of papers, reports, and grant applications and attendance of research conferences – 'Often' or 'All the time'



Source: Longitudinal Baseline Survey; Longitudinal Alumni Survey; Counterfactual Baseline Survey; Counterfactual Follow-up Survey

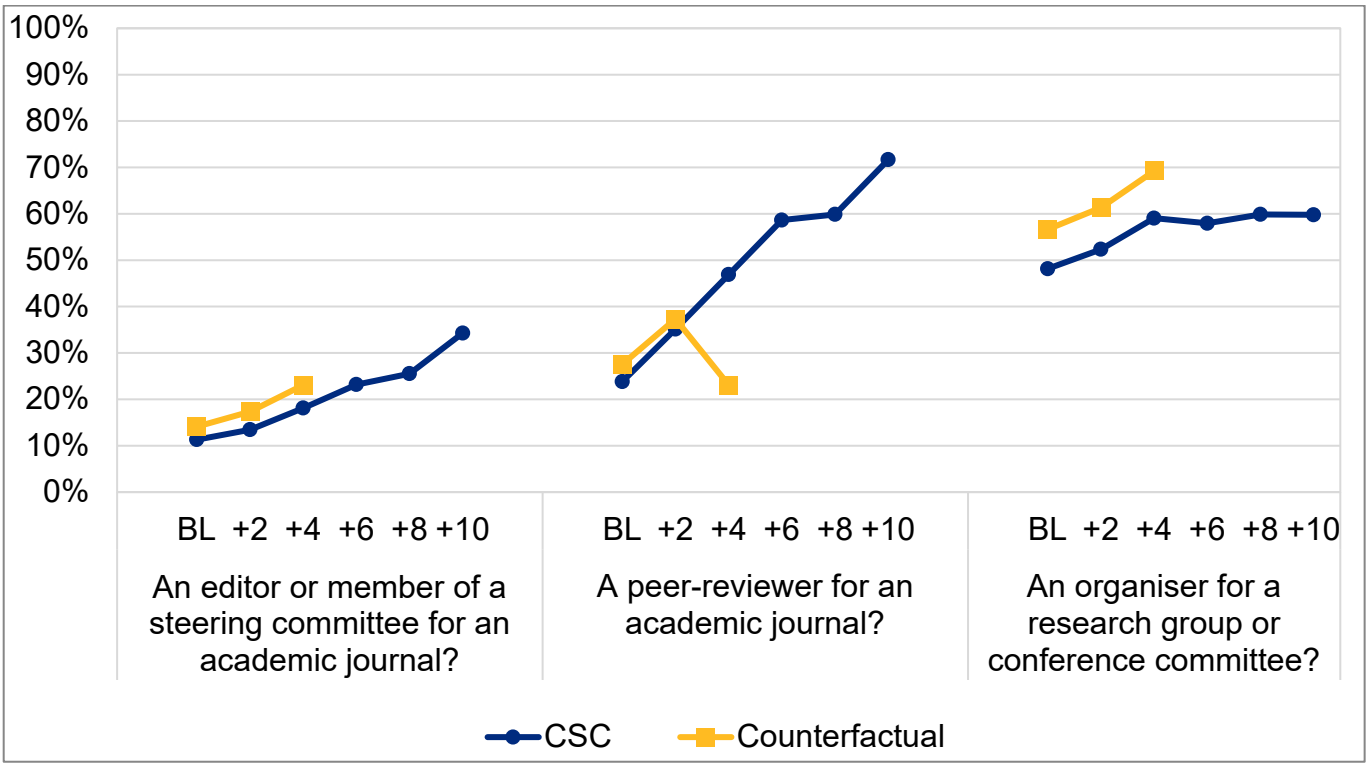
Involvement in Research Community

When asked whether they had served as an editor or member of a steering committee for an academic journal in the last two years, both the alumni and counterfactual respondents have demonstrated an upward trend throughout all reported years. While the trend for both groups is positive, a chi-squared test of independence at the two-year mark indicated no significant association between the award of the Scholarship and the likelihood of serving as an editor.

In regard to the respondents' activities as a peer reviewer for an academic journal, the trend for the Counterfactual respondents differs from that of the Alumni group. Between the Baseline to the two-year mark, both the Alumni and Counterfactual groups have shown a positive trend. The curve for the Counterfactual respondents, however, drops after the two-year mark (37%), and only 23% of the Counterfactual respondents confirmed that they had been acting as peer reviewers for an academic journal at the four-year mark. While a chi-squared test of independence showed no significant association between Scholarship awards and peer-reviewing activity at the two-year mark, insufficient data was available to perform statistical testing at year four.

A similar trend is observed in Figure 33 in relation to both groups' role as an organiser for a research group or conference committee. At the two-year mark, a chi-squared test of independence showed no significant association between Scholarship status and serving as an organiser. However, once again insufficient data was available to replicate this test at the four-year mark.

Figure 33 – Involvement in the research community as an editor or member of a steering committee or a peer-reviewer for an academic journal, and organiser for a research group or conference committee – 'Yes'



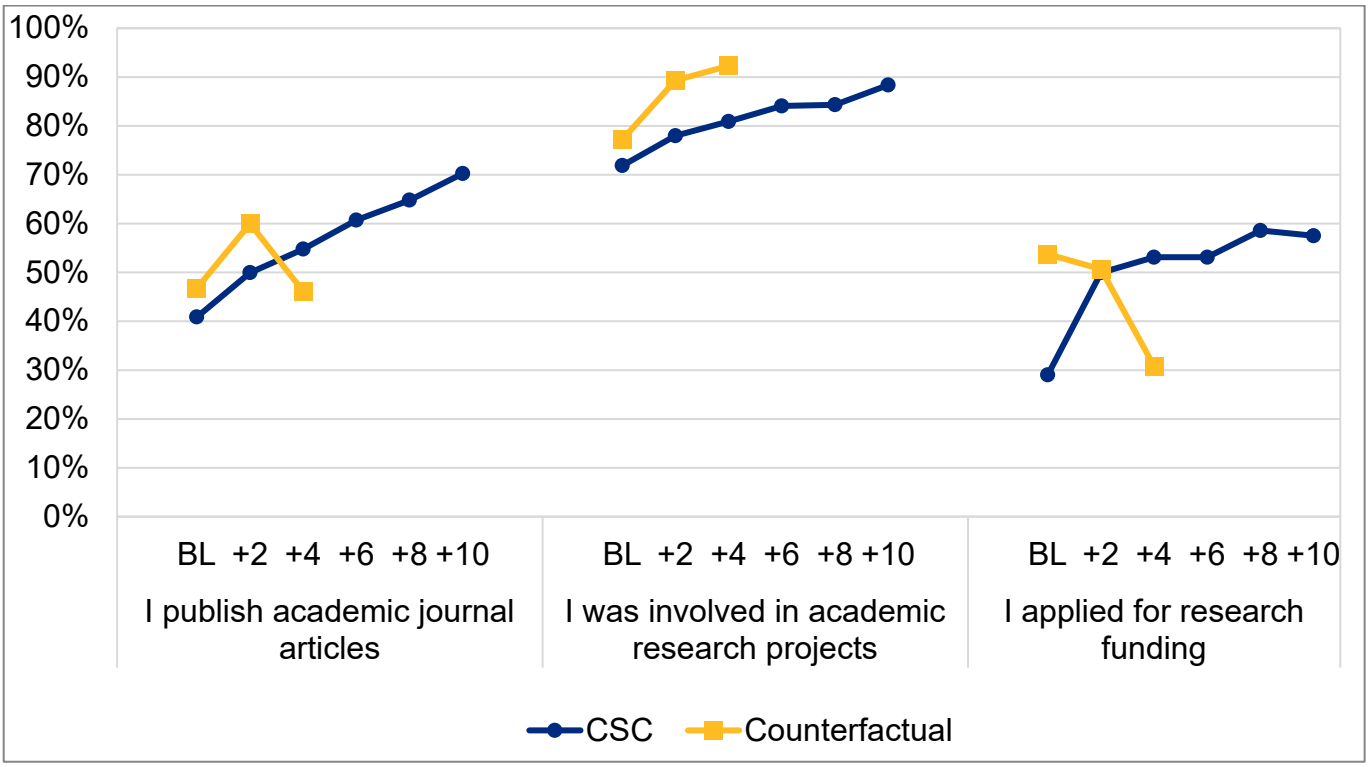
Source: Longitudinal Baseline Survey; Longitudinal Alumni Survey; Counterfactual Baseline Survey; Counterfactual Follow-up Survey

Research Activities

In response to questions about how often, in the last two years, alumni respondents had published academic journal articles (either solely or collaboratively), been involved in academic research projects, and applied for research funding, the overall trends for the Alumni group remain positive. A higher proportion of alumni reported engaging in academic research projects either 'Often' or 'All the time,' with participation ranging from 72% at the Baseline to 88% at the ten-year mark. Regarding applications for research funding, a notable increase is observed between the Baseline (29%) and the two-year mark (51%).

Compared with Counterfactual respondents, the trends for publishing journal articles or applying for research funding appear mixed or negative. The only positive trend among Counterfactual respondents is their involvement in academic research projects. Furthermore, Counterfactual respondents reported a higher frequency of activity in academic research projects than alumni.

Figure 34 – Activities related to publishing academic journal articles (either solely or collaboratively), academic research projects, and drafting application for research funding – 'Often' or 'All the time'



Source: Longitudinal Baseline Survey; Longitudinal Alumni Survey; Counterfactual Baseline Survey; Counterfactual Follow-up Survey

Summary and Analysis

The immediate outputs of the Commonwealth Scholarship programme, as explored through the Theory of Change, clearly demonstrate significant and positive impacts on the development of Scholars. The evidence strongly supports the idea that Scholars develop both soft and hard skills through their participation, with the majority of respondents indicating substantial or moderate changes across a wide range of competencies, including leadership, critical thinking, ethical sensitivity, technical skills, and research techniques. While a counterfactual group is not available for comparison, the consistent reporting of skill development among Scholars offers a robust foundation for affirming that this component of the Theory of Change is occurring as intended. These skills are further applied in workplace environments, as detailed in the subsequent sections of this report.

In terms of academic qualifications, the majority of Scholars successfully complete their degree programmes, with many obtaining degrees upon completion. The Commonwealth Distance Learning Scholarship allows for flexibility in qualification exit points, which, in some cases, results in Scholars obtaining certificates or diplomas instead of full degrees, aligning with the programme's design to accommodate different academic paths.

The Research Findings produced by Scholars are another vital output of the programme. Almost all alumni reported that their academic activities over the past two years have been directly related to their Scholarship research, illustrating the sustained impact of the award on their academic

careers. This reinforces the idea that the research conducted during the Scholarship continues to serve as the foundation for ongoing academic work.

Furthermore, the networks and relationships Scholars build during their time in the United Kingdom contribute significantly to the soft power outcomes of the programme. While there is a gradual decline in the frequency of contact with UK-based professional and academic contacts over time, the majority of Scholars maintain these networks, with the most notable increase in interactions occurring immediately after the award. The differences observed between the recipient and Counterfactual groups in the level of contact with professional, academic, and personal contacts suggest a clear effect of the Scholarship on these relationships.

Finally, the component of Additional Research highlights the continued relevance of the research conducted during the Scholarship. A significant proportion of Alumni remain involved in academic research post-Scholarship, with a marked increase in the frequency of publishing academic articles and engaging in research projects. Notably, the Alumni group also showed a strong increase in research funding applications immediately after the award, a trend not mirrored in the Counterfactual group, suggesting the Scholarship plays a significant role in enabling Alumni to secure funding and continue their research careers.

Together, these findings illustrate the broad and lasting impact of the Commonwealth Scholarship programme on its recipients, reinforcing the assumption of the Theory of Change that the programme facilitates significant development in the knowledge, skills, networks, and research capabilities of Scholars.

Section Four: Outcomes

Introduction

The Outcomes described in the CSC's Theory of Change represent the short-to-medium-term effects that occur after, and as a result of, the Activities and the Outputs generated by those Activities. These outcomes include additional activities undertaken by Alumni, made possible by their experiences at the Activity stage of the process and the Outputs that those Activities produced.

It is important to note that at this stage, the CSC's ability to influence Alumni activities and their results has become significantly limited, with external contexts and factors playing a much more prominent role. This dynamic is discussed extensively in the CSC report 'Context Matters: Enablers and Barriers to Scholarship Impact'.[34]

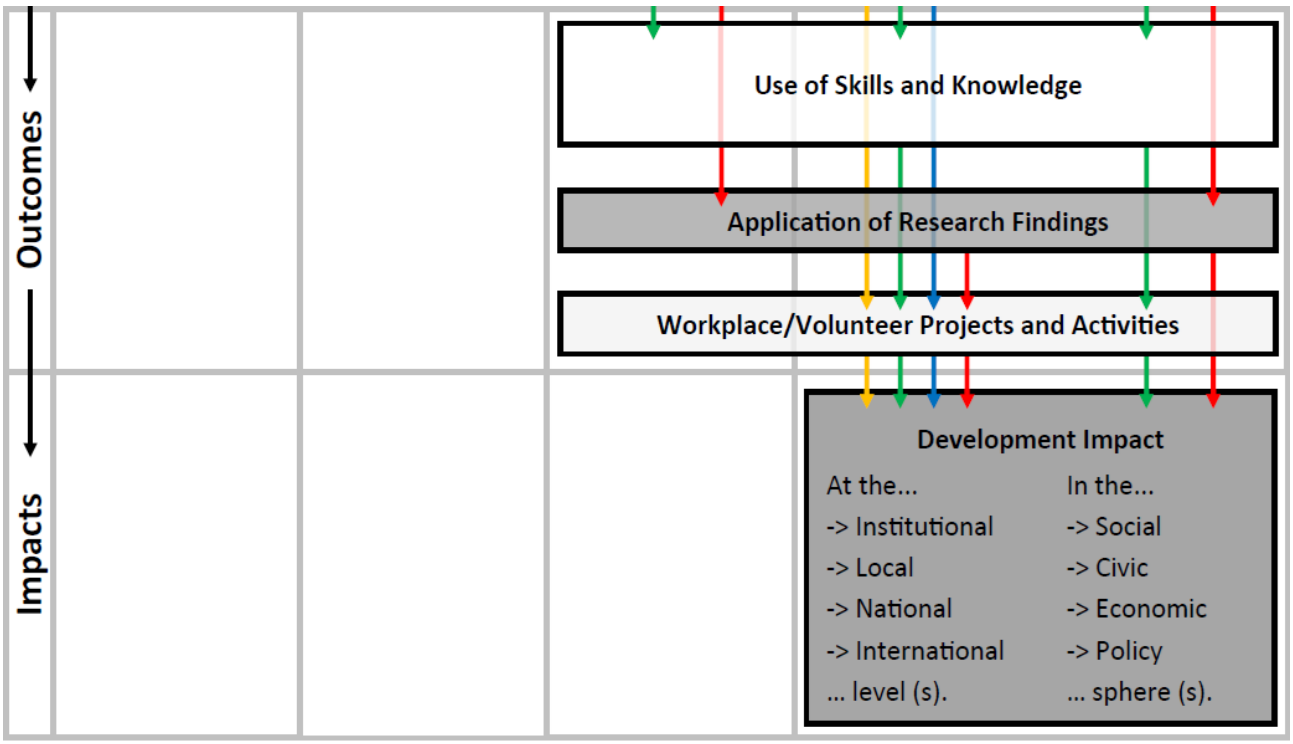
Use of Skills and Knowledge

Introduction

The Use of Skills and Knowledge by alumni in workplace or volunteer activities is the most immediate outcome of the learning that takes place during a Commonwealth Scholarship. Scholars and alumni take what they have learned from their studies and the training offered by the CSC and apply these skills and knowledge in their professional and volunteer activities. This occurs in two main ways: either through the direct application of their skills and knowledge, or by sharing them with others either as educators in a formal teaching capacity or through structured or informal workplace training. This sharing creates a multiplier effect where others also benefit indirectly from what the Scholar learned, and strengthening institutional knowledge. Notably, most Distance Learning Scholars are uniquely positioned to apply their newly acquired skills and knowledge immediately, as the vast majority remain employed while studying.

[34] See Marango and Harrison, *Experiences of Commonwealth Scholars and Alumni: Enabling and Constraining Factors to Scholarship Impact*.

Figure 35 – Use of Skills and Knowledge



FROM: Skills and Knowledge Development
INTO: Workplace/Volunteer Projects and Activities

It is assumed that Scholars and Alumni will have opportunities to use their skills and knowledge and share them with others within their organisations. However, evidence suggests that they sometimes encounter barriers, such as resource limitations and resistance from management or colleagues, particularly when attempting to implement changes within their organisation.

Analysis

Overall, the majority of alumni reported applying skills and knowledge from their studies in their employment. The data shows, within the first two years after their award end date, 92% of respondents indicated using skills or knowledge from their studies in a work-related setting. This trend remained consistent across subsequent follow-up periods, peaking at 96% at the eight-year mark. Similarly, when asked about applying skills and knowledge outside of employment, 83% of respondents reported doing so either ‘Often’ or ‘All the time’ in non-work-related contexts. While this trend remained relatively stable across follow-up periods, the proportion of respondents applying skills and knowledge outside of employment was generally lower than those using them in an employment setting.

Alumni were also asked how often they approached a problem in a different way because of something they learned during their studies. Almost all respondents reported doing so either ‘Often’ or ‘All the time’ across all follow-up periods, with the proportion of alumni reporting this remaining at approximately 95% throughout indicating that the problem-solving skills acquired during their studies continued to be valuable throughout their careers.

Alumni were also asked how often they taught a colleague something they had learned during their studies. While this question shows a slight downward trend over time from 88% at the two-year mark to 83% at the ten-year mark, it consistently remained above 80%, demonstrating that most of

alumni respondents were ‘Often’ or ‘All the time’ able to share knowledge gained during their Scholarship with colleagues.

Similarly, when asked about teaching students, consistently over 95% of respondents reported using skills and knowledge from their studies in their teaching ‘Often’ or ‘All the time’ across all follow-up years. This observation aligns with the subset of alumni involved in teaching roles.

It is also noteworthy that even at the ten-year mark, alumni continued to attribute some of the changes they had made to their experiences during the Commonwealth Scholarship.

Relatedly, alumni were also asked how often they developed training resources or guidance for others based on what they had learned during their studies. Across all follow-up surveys, over 70% of respondents indicated that they developed training resources either ‘Often’ or ‘All the time’. This finding supports the conclusion above: while Commonwealth Alumni do not create formalised training resources as frequently as they teach a colleague something, they consistently shared their scholarship skills and experiences with others in the ten years following the completion of their award.

Organisational Changes

Alumni respondents were also invited to report how frequently they encouraged their senior managers to make changes based on something they had learned during their studies. The trend is fairly consistent in this regard with a reduction only occurring between eight-year and ten-year marks from 67% to 61%. The frequency of those who confirmed their ability in encouraging their senior managers to make changes based on something they had learnt during their studies either ‘Often’ or ‘All the time’, remained above 60% throughout all reported years. Furthermore, a similar trend was also reported for their ability to make a change to their organisation's working practice based on something that they had learned during their studies.

Respondents were also given the opportunity to provide more details about how they had been applying the skills and knowledge gained from their studies to both work-related and non-work-related contexts. In total, 2,492 comments were received, which were then coded into three distinct thematic categories: the application of skills and knowledge in a work-related environment, in a non-work-related environment, and within their respective sectors. These categories were further analysed and coded into specific skills, activities, and areas or issues.

Regarding workplace application, 30% of respondents reported applying skills and knowledge in research. Those engaged in research mentioned activities such as supervising PhD students, writing research grants and proposals, designing and leading research projects, conducting research-related training workshops, and managing research. Approximately 10% of comments referred to knowledge application, with a similar proportion mentioning teaching. In both categories, respondents discussed the direct application of their knowledge; however, those categorised under teaching used their knowledge to educate students, while others applied their expertise to design projects, draft policy briefs and recommendations, and advise on technical changes to systems, such as improving general infrastructure.

Approximately 13% of comments highlighted the direct application of skills and knowledge in communication and management. Respondents who mentioned communication skills referred to activities such as presenting to colleagues or at public events, including conferences, as well as

publishing, writing, and editing. Comments categorised under the management theme described the use of interpersonal skills, leadership, relationship-building, and negotiation, alongside technical skills such as project design and management.

Among those who reported activity in a non-work-related environment, 20% had been applying their skills and knowledge to mentoring colleagues and others within their networks. Less than 10% of comments referred to activities related to personal development or volunteering.

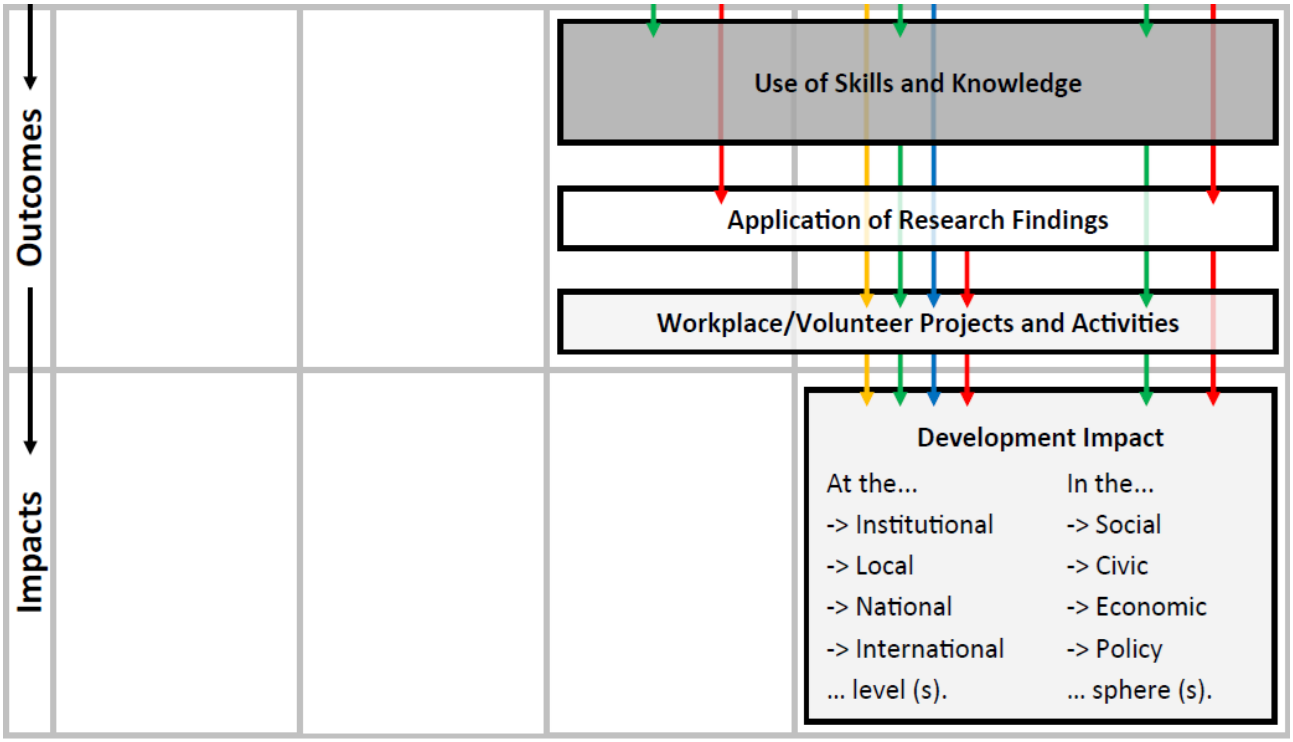
Finally, for those who reported applying their skills and knowledge in specific sectors, comments were further categorised into seven themes. The health and education sectors emerged as the primary areas of activity. About 40% of respondents reported applying their skills and knowledge in the health sector, while just over 30% cited the education sector as their main field of engagement. Around 10% of respondents reported applying their skills and knowledge in the areas of environment or climate change, with a similar proportion referring to applications related to development.

Application of Research Findings

Introduction

The Application of Research Findings refers to the implementation of research results or additional studies in a practical manner, allowing communities and wider society to benefit directly or indirectly. This application is often framed as a product that improves lives but can also take the form of new medicines or medical interventions, enhanced services, policy changes, and other innovations. The key factor is that research and its outcomes transition from a theoretical, academic, or laboratory setting into broader community use.

Figure 36 – Application of Research Findings



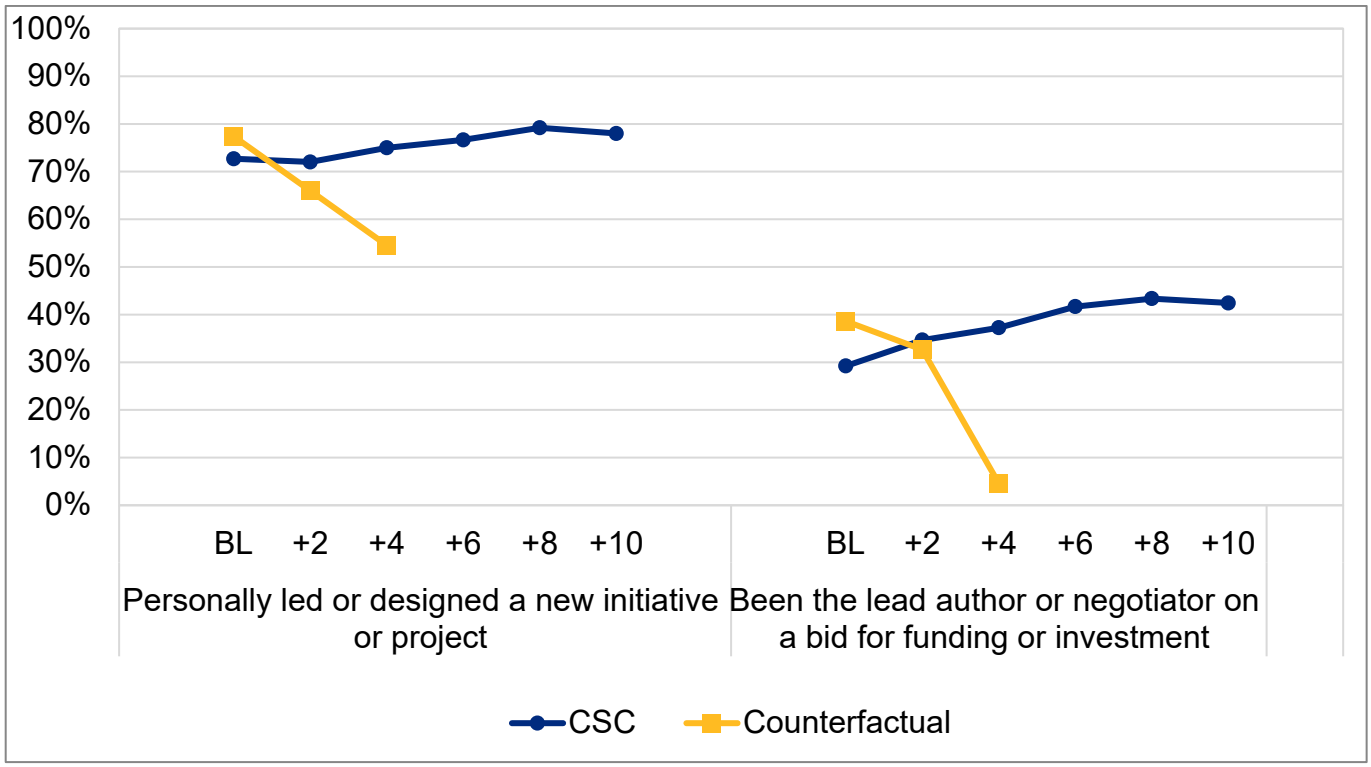
FROM: Research Findings, Additional Research
INTO: Workplace/Volunteer Projects and Activities, Development Impact

It is assumed that the research undertaken by Scholars and alumni will ultimately lead to such applications. However, it is important to recognise that, by its nature, research does not always result in tangible or identifiable outcomes. Its impact may be more indirect, sometimes emerging through the lessons and skills gained from the research process itself rather than its final outcomes. In some cases, research may even help determine which pathways of inquiry should not be pursued.

Analysis

Overall, alumni respondents demonstrated positive trends across all variables after the Baseline, with a higher proportion of alumni engaged in leading or designing new projects compared to activities involving startups or funding negotiations. Over 70% consistently reported either 'Often' or 'All the time' leading or designing a new initiative or project across all reported years, while the proportion who reported leading a bid for funding or investment rose from 30% at the Baseline to over 40% from the six-year mark onward. This compares strongly to the Counterfactual group which saw substantive trends downward.

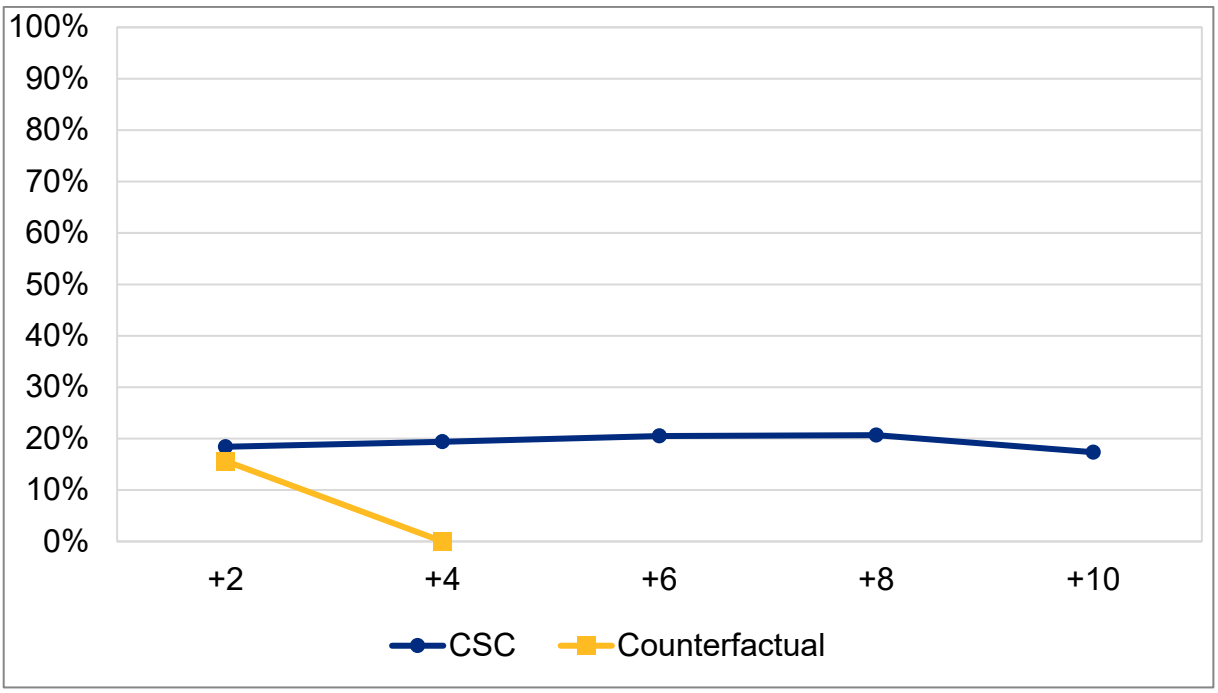
Figure 37 – Application of research findings by leading or designing a new initiative or project, been a lead author or negotiator on a bid for funding or investment – 'All the time' or 'Often'



Source: Longitudinal Baseline Survey; Longitudinal Alumni Survey; Counterfactual Baseline Survey; Counterfactual Follow-up Survey

Alumni were also asked whether they were involved in founding or co-founding a new company, department, or institute in the last two years with approximately 20% reported having done so across all data points. However, for Counterfactual respondents there was a strong trend downwards from the two-year to four-year mark.

Figure 38 – Founding or co-founding a new company, department, or institute – 'Yes'



Source: Longitudinal Alumni Survey; Counterfactual Follow-up Survey

Alumni who reported founding or co-founding a new company, department, or institute were asked to provide further details about their initiatives. A narrative analysis of their responses identified five primary themes. Nearly half of the alumni respondents reported founding or co-founding a 'Private Company,' often in fields such as health, research, and education. The nature of these companies varied widely, including consultancies, service providers, and equipment providers.

Approximately 19% of alumni reported founding or co-founding a 'Department'. In this category, notable examples included respondents who demonstrated leadership by initiating consultative processes, resulting in the expansion of their employers' businesses or the establishment of new departments or research institutes within universities or colleges.

Around 16% of respondents reported establishing a 'Charity'. These organisations ranged from grassroots-level civil society groups to entities offering services such as capacity-building support to other organisations.

A small proportion (3%) of alumni described initiating medium- to large-scale projects or programmes. Most of these were implemented by national or regional governments, either independently or in collaboration with international NGOs such as UN agencies and focused on improving public services in areas like health, infrastructure, and education.

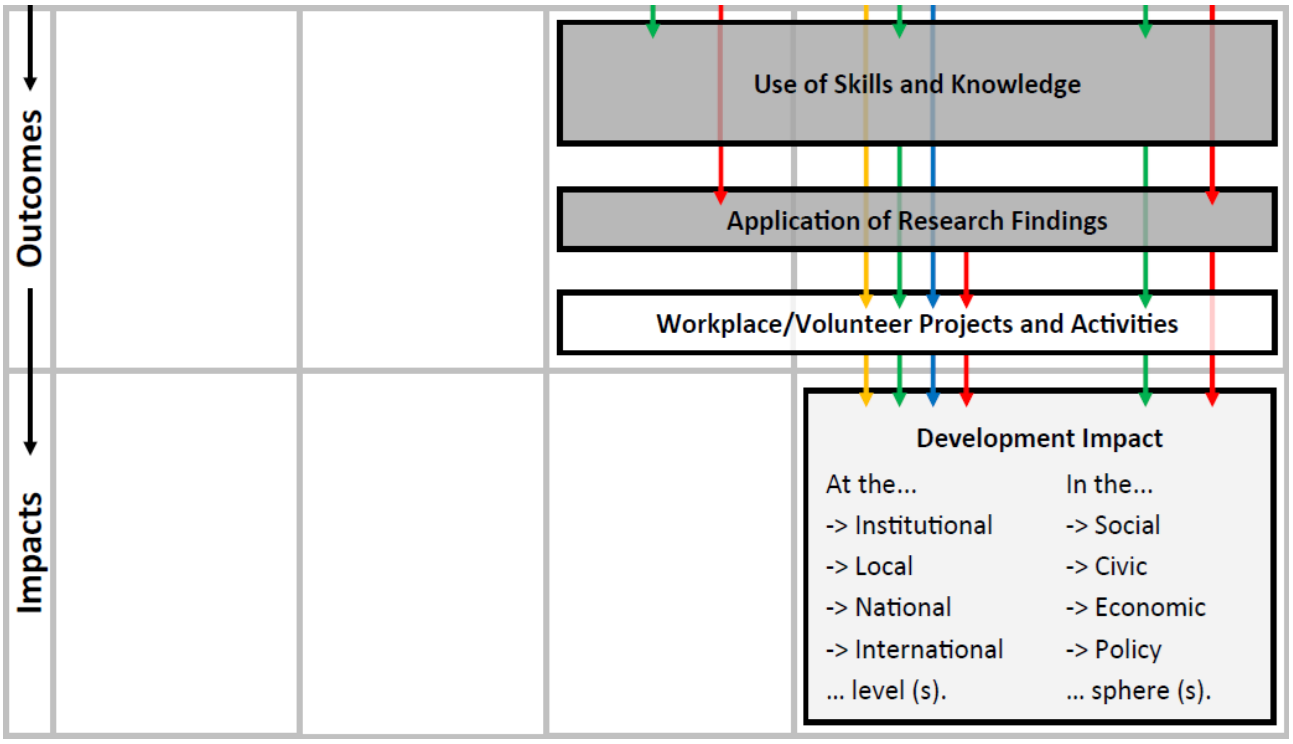
Workplace/Volunteer Projects and Activities

Introduction

Workplace/Volunteer Projects and Activities are areas of work in which Scholars and Alumni engage, having an impact on the lives of others in their communities and beyond. These are the activities where the outputs and outcomes align with the long-term impact sought by the Commonwealth Scholarship programme. The work undertaken by Scholars and Alumni, enabled through the learning, networking, and development opportunities provided by the Commonwealth

Scholarship experience, leads to changes at various levels and in the lives of the people they work with. These activities are made possible in part due to their Commonwealth Scholarship experience, as well as the skills, knowledge, and relationships they gained as a result.

Figure 39 – Workplace/Volunteer Projects and Activities



FROM: Qualification, Interpersonal Networks and Relationships, Use of Skills and Knowledge, Application of Research Findings
INTO: Development Impact

It is assumed that Scholars and alumni can secure funding, resources, and stakeholder support to engage in activities that result in development impact. In some cases, this can be difficult.[35] However, as with other instances where such barriers exist, the additional training offered to Scholars through the Leaders for Development programme aims to provide them with the skills, knowledge, and strategies needed to understand and overcome these challenges.

Analysis

Leadership Responsibilities

The contribution of Commonwealth Scholarships to leadership development was assessed by asking both Alumni and Counterfactual groups to report on their involvement in roles requiring the supervision of other employees' work, overseeing an organisation or department's budget, managing or chairing a company or department, and devising the strategic direction of an organisation or department.

As observed in other sections, the overall trends for all variables in this category show consistent or increasing proportions of positive responses from alumni respondents over time. For example, the

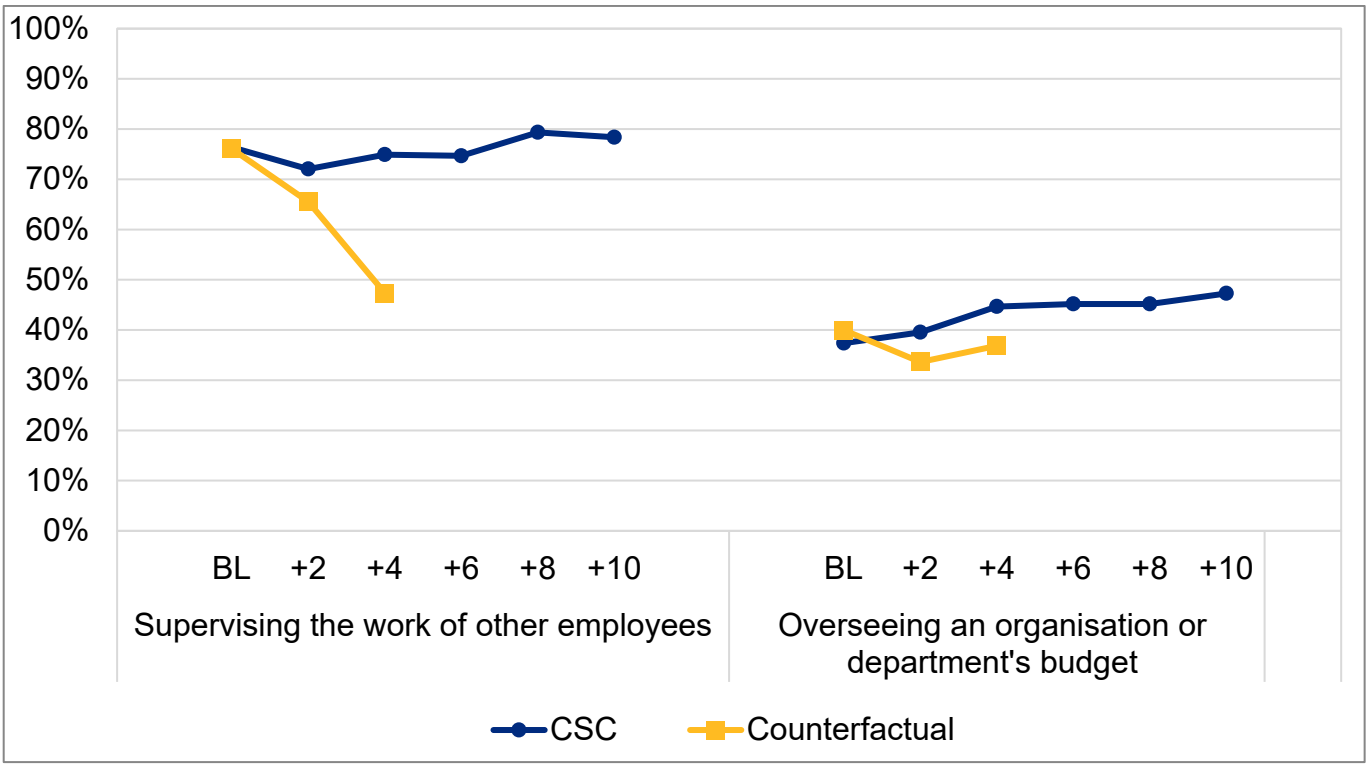
[35] Marango and Harrison, *Experiences of Commonwealth Scholars and Alumni: Enabling and Constraining Factors to Scholarship Impact*.

proportion of alumni who reported supervising other employees' work fluctuated across all years but consistently remained between 70% and 80%.

Similarly, the proportion of alumni overseeing an organisation or department's budget followed a positive trajectory, showing an increase between the Baseline and the ten-year mark (see Figure 40).

By contrast, counterfactual respondents exhibited mixed trends for this indicator and a downward trend for supervising other employees. Notably, in supervising employees, counterfactual respondents started at almost the same point as alumni but experienced a steep decline between the Baseline and the four-year mark. For overseeing a budget, the counterfactual group showed some recovery after the two-year mark but still sat below the proportion of alumni who reported holding this responsibility.

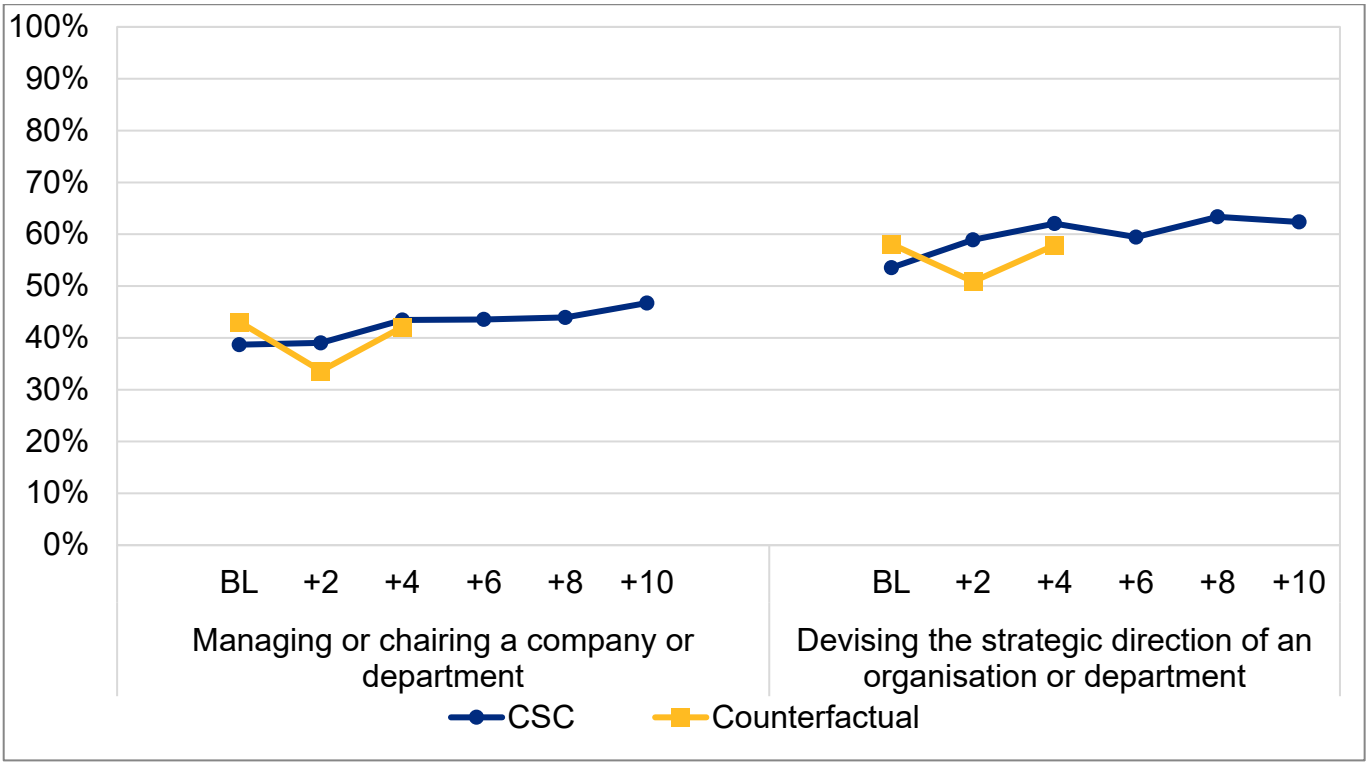
Figure 40 – Supervising the work of other employees and overseeing an organisation or department's budget – 'Yes'



Source: Longitudinal Baseline Survey; Longitudinal Alumni Survey; Counterfactual Baseline Survey; Counterfactual Follow-up Survey

For activities requiring managing or chairing a company or department (see Figure 41), alumni trends mirrored those observed for overseeing budgets (see Figure 40). Counterfactual respondents displayed a recovery after the two-year mark in both managing or chairing a company/department and devising the strategic direction of an organisation/department, eventually reaching levels close to those of the alumni respondents.

Figure 41 – Managing or chairing a company or department and devising the strategic direction of an organisation or department – 'Yes'

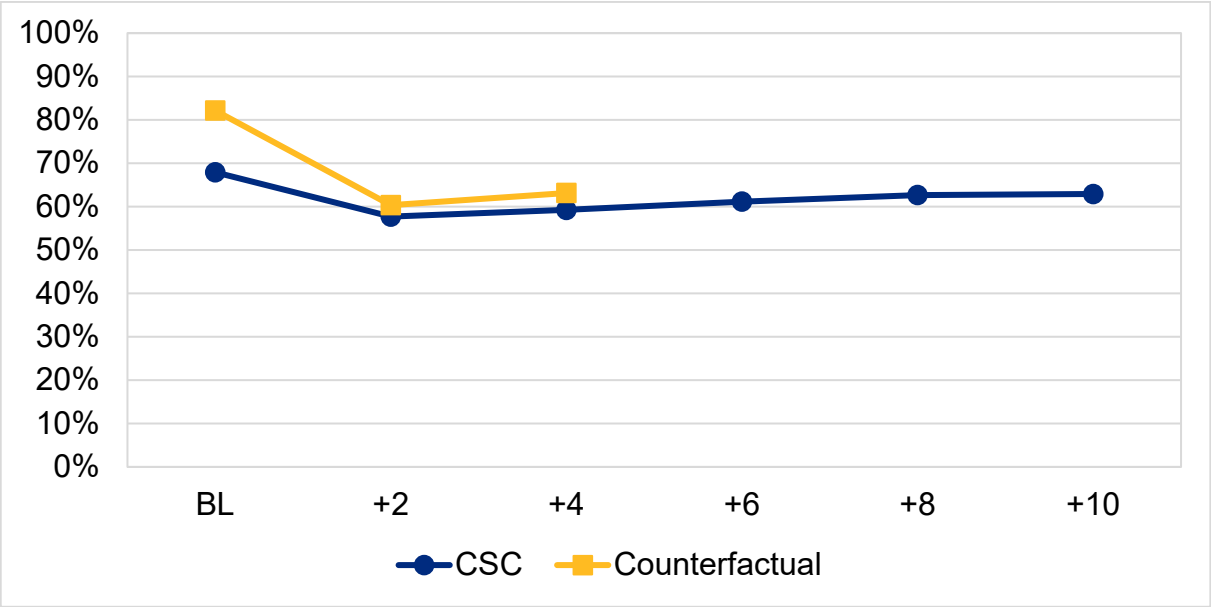


Source: Longitudinal Baseline Survey; Longitudinal Alumni Survey; Counterfactual Baseline Survey; Counterfactual Follow-up Survey

Teaching

Figure 42 shows the proportion of respondents involved in teaching students. Overall, both curves show a sudden drop at the two-year mark, potentially suggesting that both groups shift away from teaching-oriented roles and move into other professions. However, from the two-year mark onwards, the proportions remain consistent, with approximately 60% of respondents reporting continued involvement in teaching students.

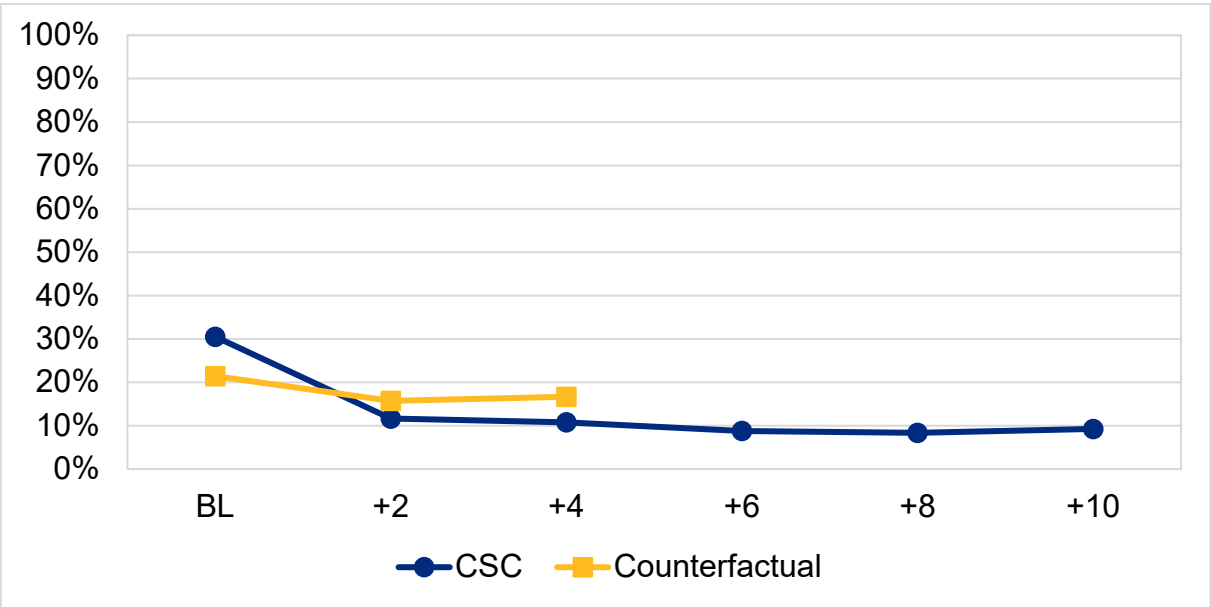
Figure 42 – Teaching students



Source: Longitudinal Baseline Survey; Longitudinal Alumni Survey; Counterfactual Baseline Survey; Counterfactual Follow-up Survey

Among those respondents who reported teaching students, they were asked a series of follow-up questions about the level of education at which they taught. Figure 43 shows the proportions involved in teaching primary or secondary students. At the Baseline, just over 30% of Alumni group reported undertaking teaching activities at the school level, while about 20% of the Counterfactual group reported the same. This proportion drops at the two-year mark for both groups, although the Alumni group sees a greater reduction, with the proportion of the Counterfactual group reporting teaching primary and secondary students remaining higher at both the two-year and four-year survey points.

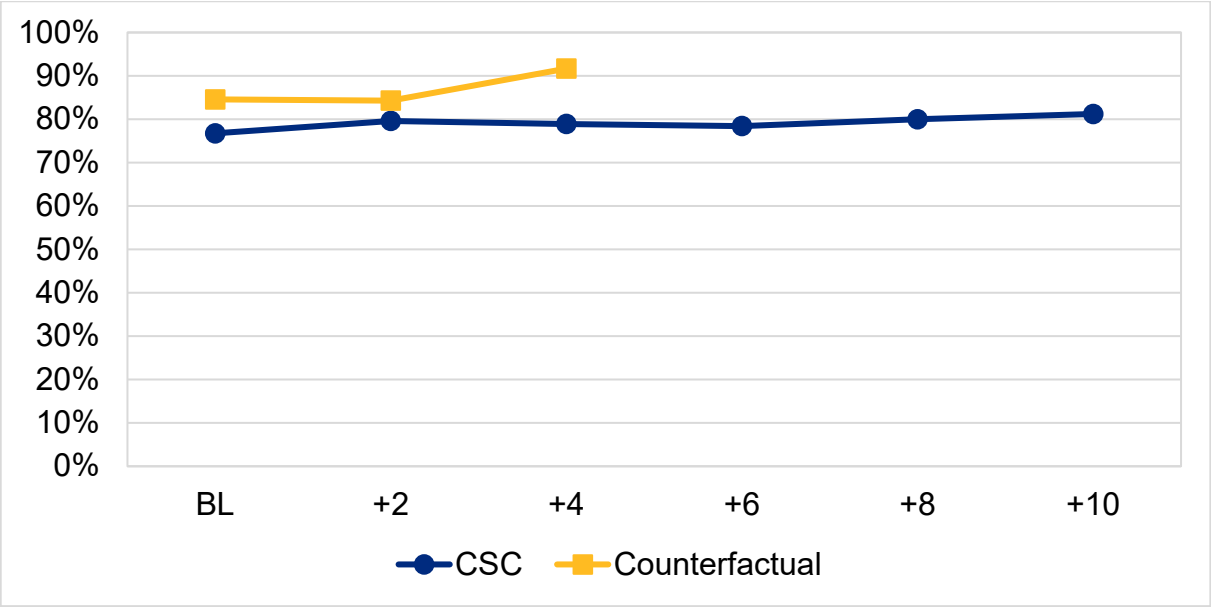
Figure 43 – Teaching School (primary or secondary)



Source: Longitudinal Baseline Survey; Longitudinal Alumni Survey; Counterfactual Baseline Survey; Counterfactual Follow-up Survey

In contrast, the majority of respondents in both groups who were involved in teaching reported teaching undergraduate students. Overall, a higher proportion of Counterfactual respondents reported teaching at the undergraduate level compared to the Alumni group, who nevertheless still consistently reported doing so at a high rate.

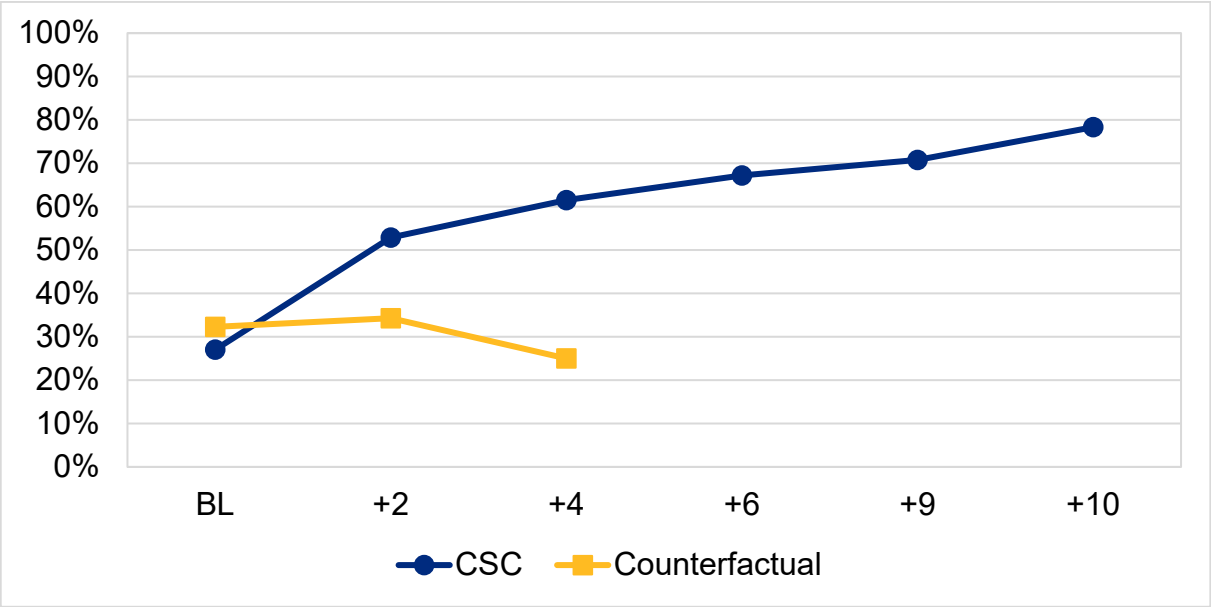
Figure 44 – Teaching Undergraduate higher education



Source: Longitudinal Baseline Survey; Longitudinal Alumni Survey; Counterfactual Baseline Survey; Counterfactual Follow-up Survey

However, the trend for the Alumni group reporting teaching activities at the postgraduate level is increasing over time, with a much higher rate than the Counterfactual group. For instance, a third of the Counterfactual group reported teaching activities at the postgraduate level at Baseline and the two-year mark, which drops to 25% at the four-year mark. By contrast, while a slightly lower proportion of Alumni (27%) reported teaching activities at the postgraduate level at Baseline, the proportion rises sharply at the two-year mark and continues to increase over time, reaching nearly 80% of respondents who reported being engaged in teaching students at the postgraduate level at the ten-year mark.

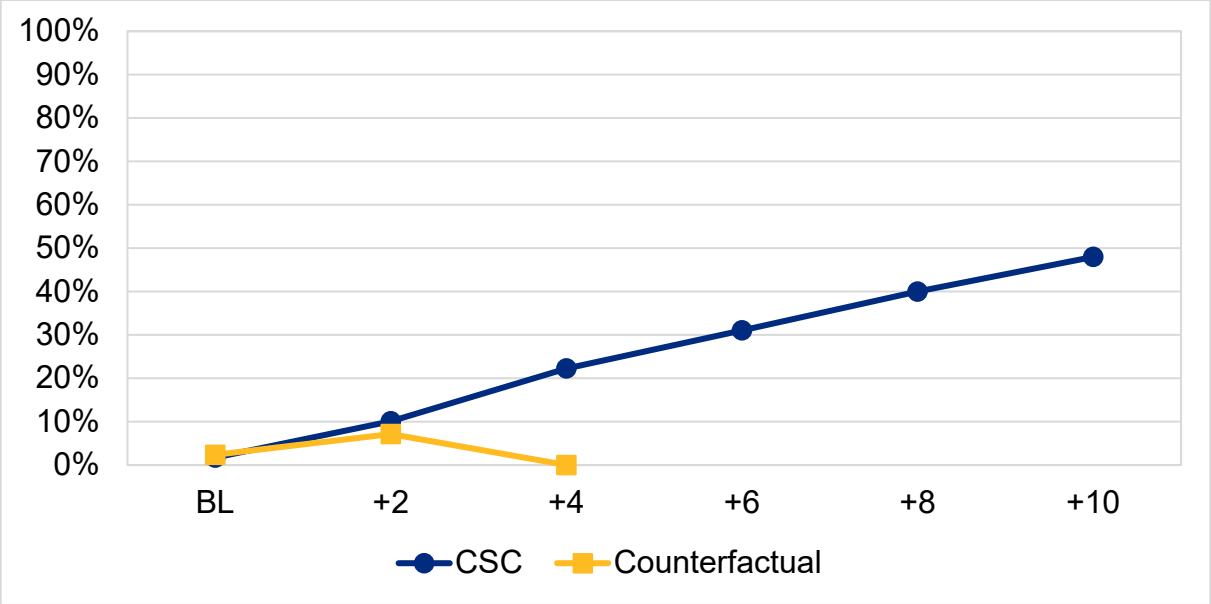
Figure 45 – Teaching Postgraduate higher education



Source: Longitudinal Baseline Survey; Longitudinal Alumni Survey; Counterfactual Baseline Survey; Counterfactual Follow-up Survey

A similar, but even more stark, pattern can be seen when it comes to doctoral degree supervision (Figure 46). When asked whether they were providing supervision to doctoral students, the trend on the Alumni group's curve shows a continuous rise over time, in contrast to the trend observed for the Counterfactual group. By the ten-year mark, almost half of the Alumni reported being involved in doctoral degree supervision, compared to nearly none at the Baseline.

Figure 46 – Doctoral degree supervision

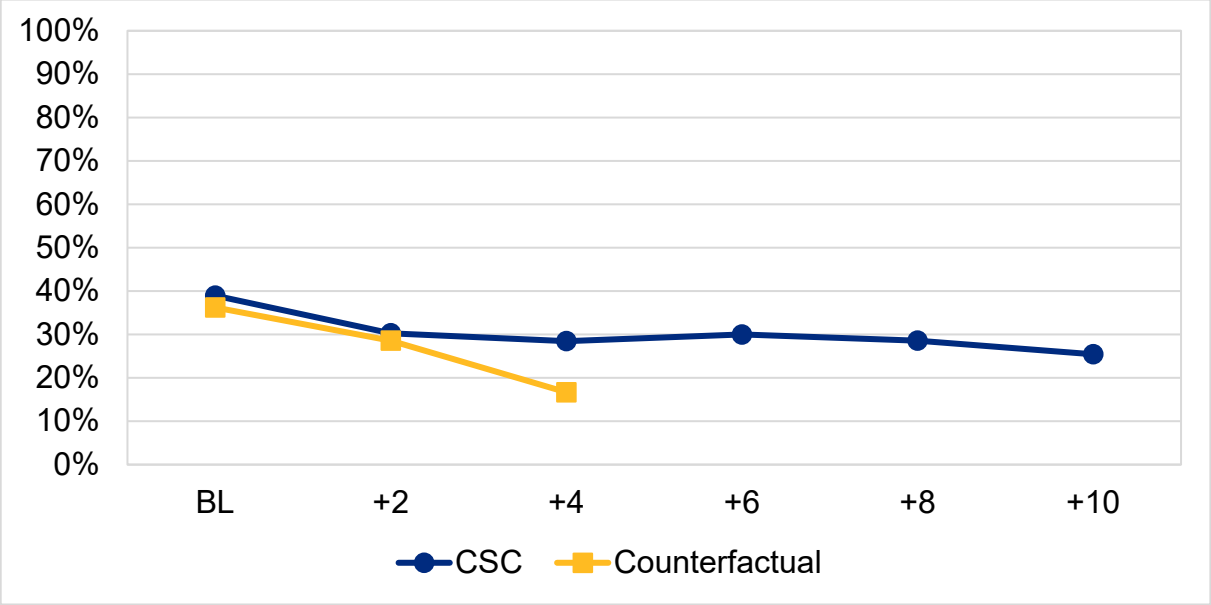


Source: Longitudinal Baseline Survey; Longitudinal Alumni Survey; Counterfactual Baseline Survey; Counterfactual Follow-up Survey

Finally, the overall trend for those reporting involvement in technical or vocational teaching activities is negative for both groups. At the Baseline, over a third of both the Alumni and Counterfactual groups reported involvement in providing technical or vocational training. However,

the proportion slowly reduces to a quarter for Alumni by the ten-year mark and to less than 20% for the Counterfactual group at the four-year mark.

Figure 47 – Technical or vocational training

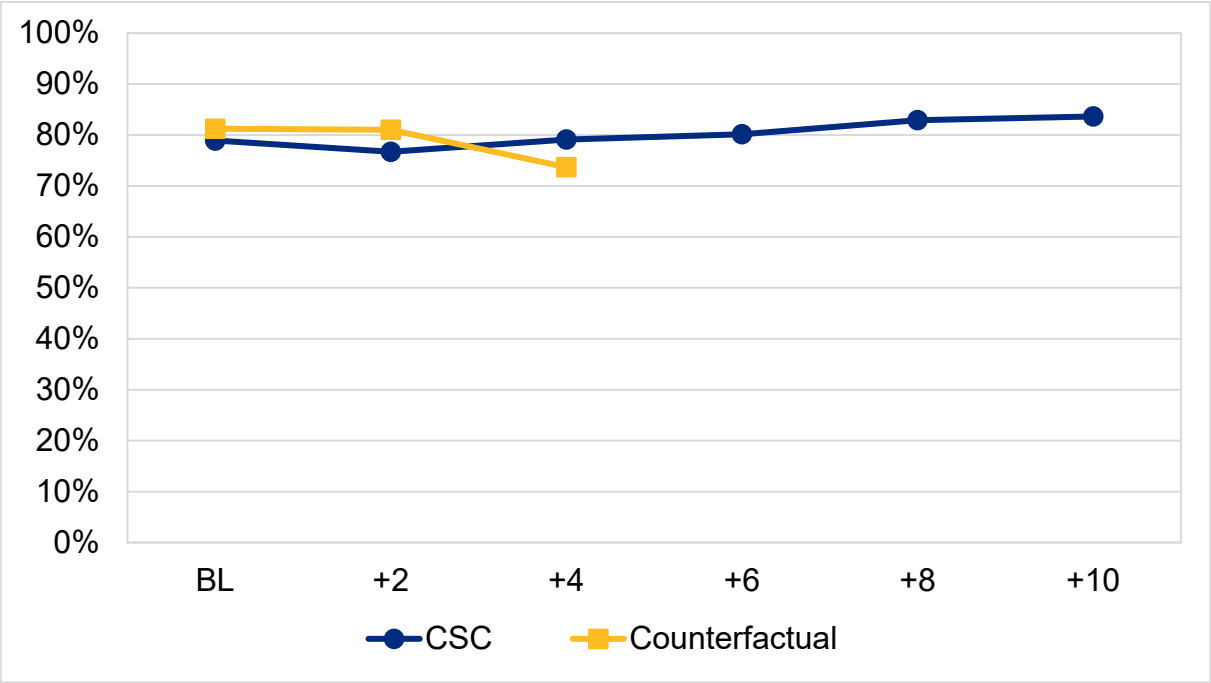


Source: Longitudinal Baseline Survey; Longitudinal Alumni Survey; Counterfactual Baseline Survey; Counterfactual Follow-up Survey

Workplace Context

Overall, the proportion of the Alumni group reporting that their senior managers supported suggestions to implement new practices 'All the time' or 'Often' remains relatively consistent over time and compared to the proportion of the Counterfactual group reporting the same. At the Baseline, a marginally higher percentage of Counterfactual respondents (81%) reported being supported by their senior managers in this way compared to Alumni (79%). However, at the four-year mark, the proportion of Counterfactual respondents reporting this drops to 74%, while for Alumni, there is a slight upward trend. Gradually, the proportion of Alumni who reported being supported by their senior managers when suggesting new practices increases, and by the ten-year mark this reaches 84%.

Figure 48 – Support of senior managers for new practices – ‘All the time’ or ‘Often’

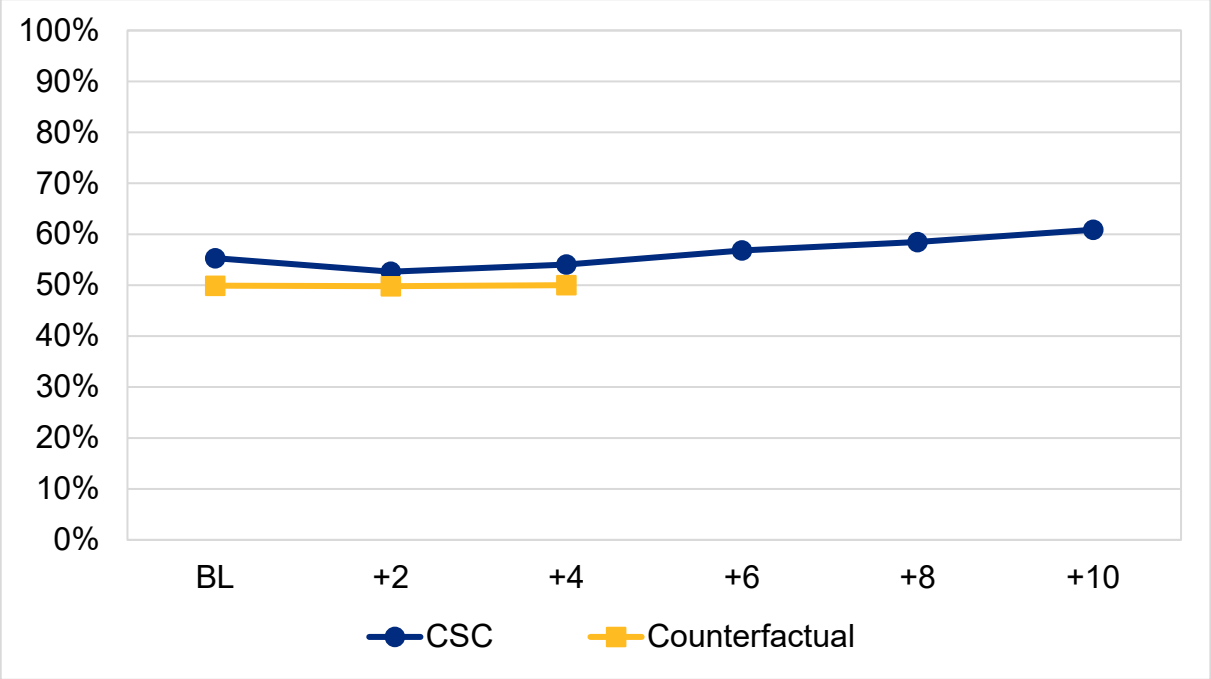


Source: Longitudinal Baseline Survey; Longitudinal Alumni Survey; Counterfactual Baseline Survey; Counterfactual Follow-up Survey

When asked the same question regarding support from coworkers when suggesting new practices, the proportion of Alumni who reported being supported by their immediate coworkers has remained consistently higher than that of the Counterfactual group. For the Counterfactual group, however, the proportion tapers from 89% at the Baseline to 84% at the four-year mark, while for the Alumni group, more than 90% report being supported across all data points.

In the case of respondents' organisations having the resources to implement newly suggested practices, a higher percentage of Alumni reported that their organisation did so ‘All the time’ or ‘Often’ compared to the Counterfactual group. There is also a positive trend in this response from Alumni over time, as the proportion slowly rises from 55% at Baseline to 61% at the ten-year mark, while the proportion for the Counterfactual group remains flat at 50% across all data points.

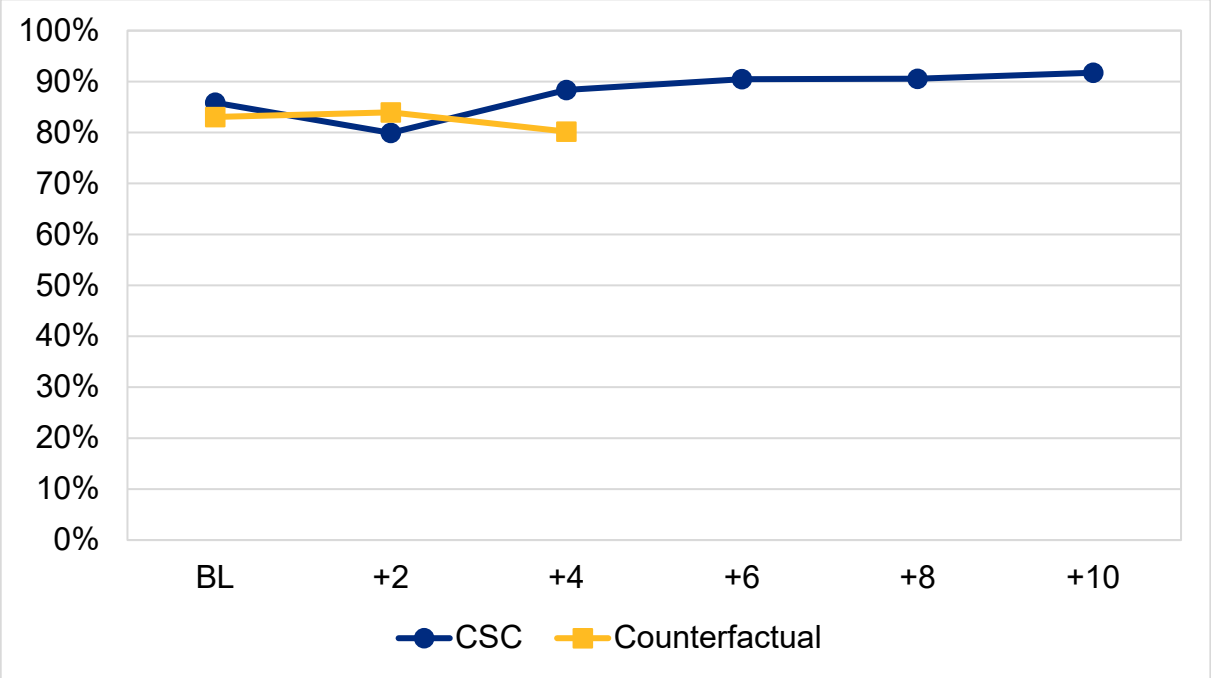
Figure 49 – Organisation has the resources to implement new practices – 'All the time' or 'Often'



Source: Longitudinal Baseline Survey; Longitudinal Alumni Survey; Counterfactual Baseline Survey; Counterfactual Follow-up Survey

Figure 50 demonstrates that a higher percentage of the Alumni group reported having a voice in deciding how to do their job at the Baseline (86%) compared to the Counterfactual group. The opposite is true at the two-year mark, due to a drop in the proportion for Alumni, but this reverses again at the four-year mark where from then on approximately 90% of Alumni reported they had a voice in how to do their job.

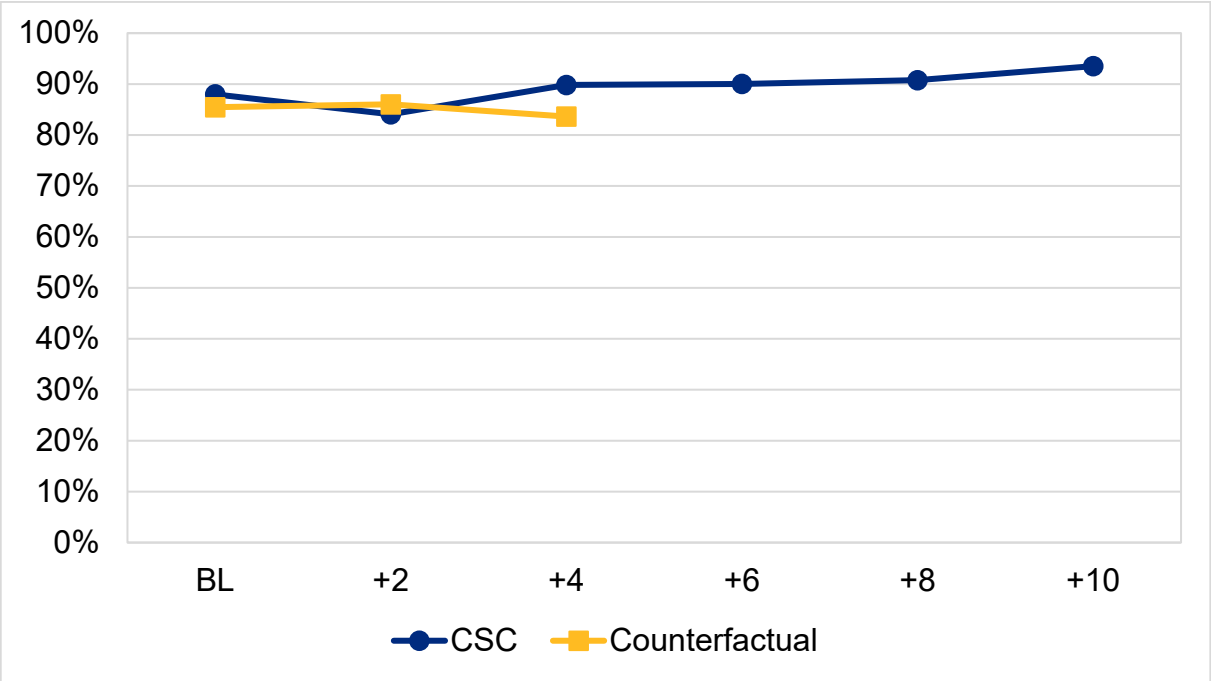
Figure 50 – Voice in deciding how to do job – 'All the time' or 'Often'



Source: Longitudinal Baseline Survey; Longitudinal Alumni Survey; Counterfactual Baseline Survey; Counterfactual Follow-up Survey

Figure 51 shows a similar trend to that in Figure 50. Overall, the trend for the Alumni group remains positive, although the change becomes sharper in the last two surveys. In contrast, the curve for the Counterfactual group is relatively flat over time.

Figure 51 – Voice in work team – 'All the time' or 'Often'



Source: Longitudinal Baseline Survey; Longitudinal Alumni Survey; Counterfactual Baseline Survey; Counterfactual Follow-up Survey

Summary and Analysis

This section examined components of the Theory of Change, where Commonwealth Alumni begin to apply the immediate outputs from their studies into broader workplace settings. The overwhelming majority of the Alumni group consistently reported throughout the follow-up period that they have been using the skills and knowledge acquired during their CSC Scholarship in their current employment as well as outside employment. Almost all stated that they approach problems in a different way because of something they learned during their studies, and many reported that they teach their colleagues something they learned and developed training resources or guidance for others based on their studies. This demonstrates an important multiplier effect of the Scholarship, with knowledge and skills acquired by Scholars shared with others in their workplaces post-Scholarship.

There is a strong perception among most alumni that they have been able to encourage a senior manager to make a change based on something they learned during their studies, demonstrating the influence and authority Scholars gain with their degrees. Almost all respondents also reported making changes to their organisation's working practices based on what they learned, highlighting the translation of on-award learning into changes in organisational practices.

The proportion of alumni who reported personally leading or designing a new initiative or project increased slightly but consistently over the years, compared to the Counterfactual group, where the initially high proportion of respondents choosing this answer decreased substantially. This suggests that the Scholarship played an important role in enabling leadership roles and initiating new

projects post-study. Even more profound was the difference between the two groups in relation to being the lead author or negotiator on a bid for funding or investment. The Alumni group showed a steady increase over the years, while the Counterfactual group experienced a sharp decline. Another notable difference between the groups was their response to founding or co-founding a new company, department, or institute. The Alumni group was more likely to have done so compared to the Counterfactual group, particularly by the four-year mark.

Receiving a Scholarship appears to have an effect on holding responsibility for supervising the work of other employees, overseeing budgets, devising strategic directions, and managing or chairing organisations or departments over the years, while the Counterfactual group showed a decrease in these activities. Alumni also reported strong support from their managers and co-workers when suggesting or implementing new practices and gained increased authority over time in decision-making in their own and their team's work.

Alumni involved in teaching students reported reduced teaching activities at the primary and secondary levels, and while there was no reported reduction in teaching university undergraduates, major differences were observed in postgraduate teaching and doctoral degree supervision, where the Scholarship appears to have made a substantial difference. The proportion of alumni supervising and teaching at the postgraduate level increased sharply immediately after their studies and continued to rise in all follow-up surveys. The Counterfactual group, while initially having a higher proportion of respondents teaching postgraduate students, showed decreases over time in the proportion of respondents supervising doctoral students and teaching at the postgraduate level. These results indicate that Commonwealth Scholarships had a substantial influence on increasing the proportion of alumni teaching at the postgraduate level and supervising doctoral students, demonstrating the broader impact of the Scholarship on spreading knowledge within academia by training and supervising the next generation of researchers and postgraduate students.

In summary, this section of the Theory of Change is broadly supported by the evidence held by the CSC. There is substantial evidence showing that Commonwealth Alumni are applying the skills and knowledge they gained during their studies in both employment and non-employment contexts. Alumni also reported sharing the skills and knowledge acquired during their studies with others in their workplaces, either through on-the-job teaching or by developing training resources for their organisations.

When it comes to the Application of Research Findings, clear differences exist between the Recipient and Counterfactual groups in the frequency of starting new businesses or departments and pursuing funding opportunities. However, these activities may not be the strongest metrics for assessing the Application of Research Findings, as the CSC does not have direct evidence linking these activities to specific research. In some cases, alumni engage in these activities independently of research. This suggests that further reflection is needed on the role of innovation activities in the Theory of Change and how the Application of Research Findings is measured.

Finally, evidence related to Workplace and Volunteer Projects and Activities shows increases in leadership-related activities and broadly supportive workplace contexts. There are also clear differences between alumni involved in teaching and the Counterfactual group, particularly in postgraduate teaching and doctoral student supervision. However, many specific activities related to sustainable development impact are covered in the next section.

Section Five: Impact

Introduction

In a Theory of Change, Impact is the long-term result of the Inputs and Activities that comprise an intervention. For the Commonwealth Scholarship programme, the Impact is represented by the changes made to people's lives through the Application of Research Findings and their Workplace/Volunteer Projects and activities. These are the culmination of the initial investments that provided Scholars with the education, training, and opportunities that they might otherwise not have had without their Commonwealth Scholarship.

Sustainable Development Impact

Introduction

The Sustainable Development Impact of the work that Scholars and Alumni do during and after their Scholarship is the ultimate end-goal of the Commonwealth Scholarship programme. It is the realisation of the investment made in each individual Scholar through their studies. It is important to recognise that the types and scopes of impact that Scholars and Alumni have will differ greatly from each other due to the variation in both their subjects of study, the types of work that they do post-Scholarship, and the geographical regions in which they work. As discussed earlier, this flexibility is one of the strengths of the programme because it does not prescribe the subjects of study or potential career paths of Alumni and allows for people to apply to study in any area as long as they can make a credible case for how it will ultimately have a development impact.

Figure 52 – Sustainable Development Impact

FROM: Application of Research Findings, Workplace/Volunteer Projects and Activities
INTO: N/A

Most of the assumptions associated with this component are extensions of the assumptions that appeared in the Outcomes section around Alumni's abilities to secure funding, resources, and support for their work that will enable them to undertake activities that have a Development Impact. As noted previously, the CSC provides Scholars and alumni resources to overcome these issues through training and signposting of funding opportunities and further training resources that they can use to help overcome any of these issues that they may encounter.

Analysis

This section aims to examine the long-term impact made by the Alumni group compared to the non-recipient Counterfactual group and to what extent the Scholarship contributes to Alumni's impact. By doing so, it seeks to establish a reasonable pathway for demonstrating how Commonwealth Scholarships contribute to sustainable development impact.

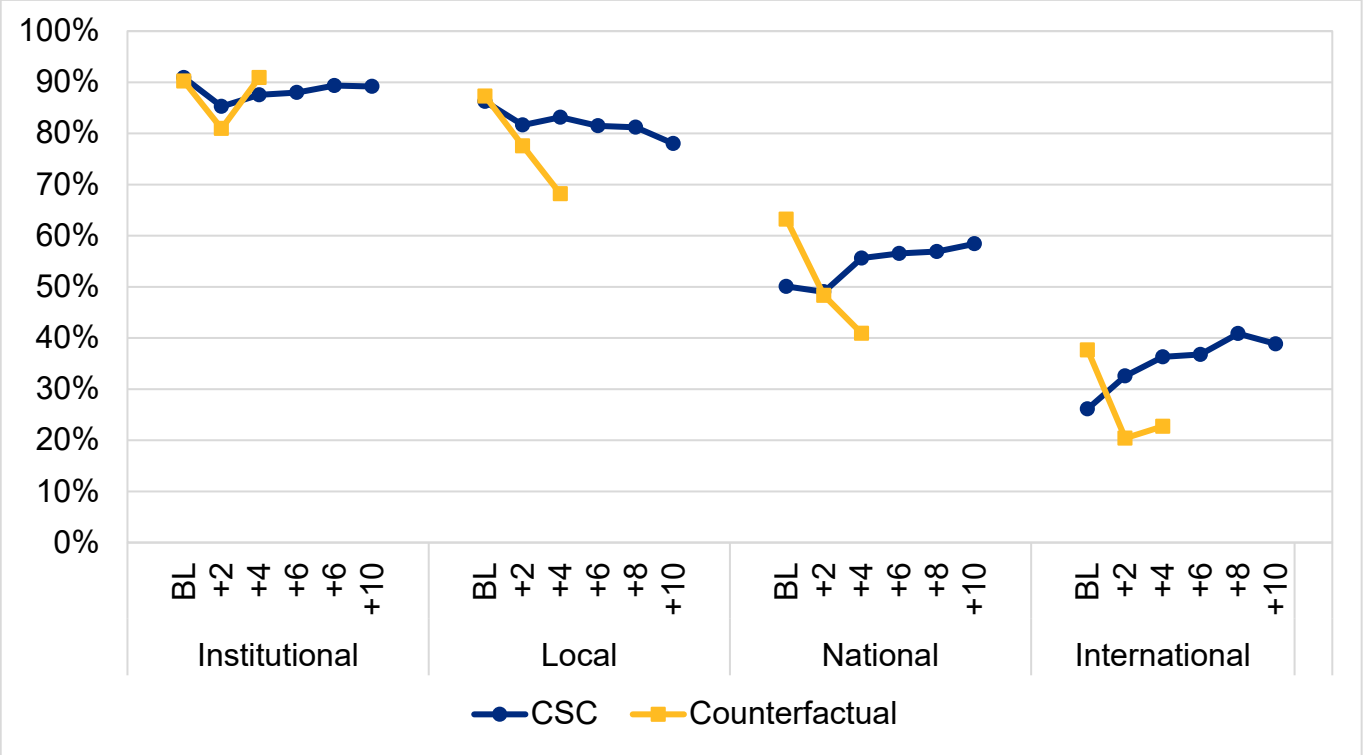
The following section utilises descriptive analysis to portray how the Alumni and Counterfactual respondents perceived their development impact at different levels and in various spheres over time, whether similarly or differently. Subsequently, the chi-square test of independence is employed to investigate whether a significant difference existed between the two groups in making an impact across levels and spheres at the two-year and four-year follow-up points, as these were the only comparable follow-up points. Following this, the section offers insights into where and how the Commonwealth Alumni impacted various levels and spheres by visualising the impact examples in the survey and excerpts from previously conducted case studies.

Levels of Impact

The data in Figure 53 displays a consistent hierarchy in the impact levels between Alumni and Counterfactual groups over time, with the highest proportion reporting their impact at the institutional level and the lowest at the international level. This suggests that irrespective of receiving the Scholarship, institutions or organisations are more commonly the starting point for making changes or impact.

A notable trend in Figure 53 is the divergence between Alumni and Counterfactual respondents in reporting national and international impact. The Scholarship appears to increase the likelihood of making an impact at these levels. Despite a lower percentage of the Alumni group reporting national and international impact than Counterfactuals at the Baseline, an upward trend is observed over time. In contrast, although a higher percentage of Counterfactuals initially reported national and international impact at the Baseline, these percentages dropped substantially, decreasing substantially by the four-year mark.

Figure 53 – Levels of impact perceived by Alumni and Counterfactual respondents over time



Source: Scholar Baseline Survey; Alumni Longitudinal Survey; Counterfactual Baseline Survey; Counterfactual Longitudinal Survey

Further statistical analysis revealed that respondents who received a Commonwealth Scholarship were more likely to create an impact at the international level (33%) than the Counterfactuals (20%) at the two-year mark. The chi-square test of independence resulted in a chi-square statistic (χ^2) of 9.311, with 1 degree of freedom. The p-value (0.00227782) being less than 0.01 indicates a statistically significant association between receiving Scholarships and international impact. However, despite the statistical significance, Cramer's V value (0.067), the most commonly used test to examine the chi-square results, is less than 0.1, indicating a weak association.

No statistically significant differences between the two groups were observed at any other levels of impact at the two-year mark. Furthermore, at four-year mark no significant differences were observed at any levels of impact. This result may be subject to the relatively small data samples collected from the Counterfactual group.

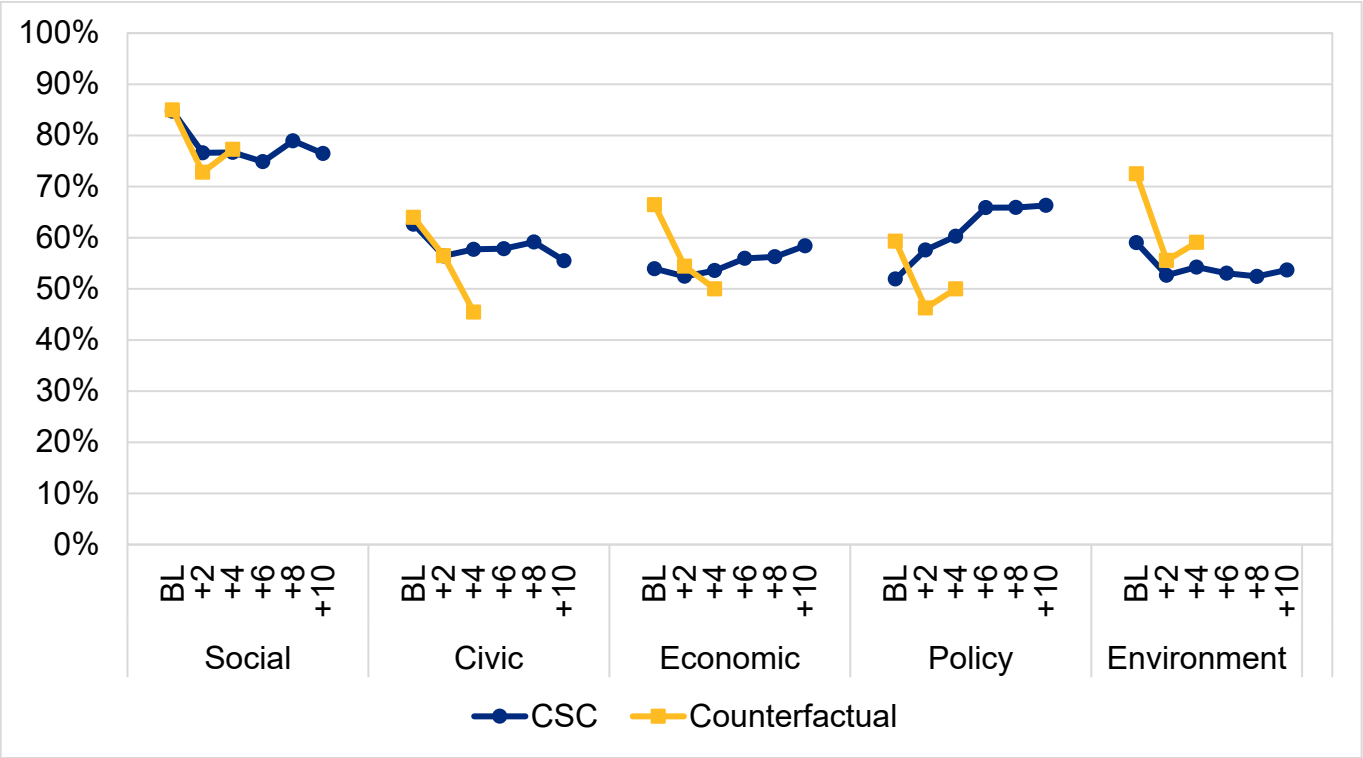
Spheres of Impact

The data presented in Figure 54 shows that more respondents from both groups reported impacting social development than other spheres during and after applying for the Scholarships. In every impact sphere, the percentages of Counterfactual respondents reporting an impact were higher than those of the Alumni group at the Baseline. This was particularly noticeable in economic, policy, and environmental spheres, however these percentages decreased across all spheres for Counterfactual respondents at the two-year mark.

On the other hand, despite the lower percentages of Alumni reporting impact in the economic and policy spheres compared to Counterfactual respondents at the Baseline, the percentages of those Alumni reporting impact in both spheres increased in the post-Scholarship period. Notably, the

percentage of Commonwealth Alumni reporting having a policy impact increased by nearly 15% at the ten-year mark compared to the Baseline.

Figure 54 – Spheres of impact perceived by Recipient and Counterfactual respondents over time



Source: Scholar Baseline Survey; Alumni Longitudinal Survey; Counterfactual Baseline Survey; Counterfactual Longitudinal Survey

Further statistical analysis revealed that respondents who received the Commonwealth Scholarships were more likely to generate an impact in the policy sphere (58%) than the Counterfactual respondents (46%) at the two-year mark. The chi-square test of independence resulted in a chi-Square statistic (χ^2) of 7.154, with 1 degree of freedom. The p-value (0.0074797) being less than 0.01 indicates a statistically significant association between receiving scholarships and policy impact. However, despite the statistical significance, Cramer's V value (0.059) is less than 0.1, indicating a weak association.

No statistically significant differences between the two groups were observed in any other spheres of impact at this follow-up point, nor such differences were observed at the four-year mark. This result may also be due to the relatively small data samples collected from the counterfactual group.

Examples of Impact

Commonwealth Alumni were also asked to provide specific examples of how they have made an impact in areas such as social development, civic engagement, economic development, policymaking, and the environment or climate change. Of 9,701 respondents, 29% provided examples of how their work created impact. These impact examples were coded, analysed and visualised, with excerpts selected from case studies to provide further insights and illustration.

The most frequently cited themes throughout the comments were 'health' (30%), 'policy' (29%), and 'education' (21%), mentioned by over one-fifth of respondents. Other key themes cited by over 10%

of respondents were 'economic' (17%), 'publishing' (16%), 'community' (15%), 'environmental' (14%), 'research' (13%), 'training' (11%), and 'equity and access' (10%). This suggests that the reported impact was closely associated with the health, education, economic, and environmental sectors or issues. The community might be the primary beneficiary or the common place where the impact happened, and policy, research, publishing, and training could be common approaches through which respondents created their impact. As shown later in this section, the theme ‘policy’ was closely linked to all the impact sectors, such as ‘health’, ‘education’, ‘economic’, and ‘environment’. Instead of reporting separately, it was reported in association with different impact sectors.

Firstly, under the theme of ‘health’, Figure 55 shows the reported impact closely related to ‘policy’, ‘community’, ‘research’, ‘care’, and ‘service’. This suggests that health challenges, particularly healthcare and services, could typically be addressed through research and policy influence, ultimately benefiting the community.

Figure 55 – Emerged themes of health-related impact

Source: Longitudinal Alumni Survey

Respondents reported various health-related engagements, including improving healthcare access, strengthening the quality and efficient healthcare facilities and services, addressing specific physical healthcare and issues related to eye, dental, reproductive, palliative care and mental health, as well as tackling public health challenges including communicable and non-communicable diseases. Children, adolescents, women and marginalised groups were frequently highlighted, especially in the rural and remote areas facing healthcare and hygiene challenges. For example, Dr Olusimbo Kehinde Ige, a 2012 Distance learning Commonwealth Scholarships awardee from Nigeria, spearheaded the One Million Children initiative between 2015 and 2020, leading to a 25% reduction in child mortality from malaria, pneumonia, and diarrhoea:

'A total of 1,075,732 children [exceeding the one million target] were reached with life-saving interventions, ensuring that they had access to all essential health services up to the age of five.' [36]

Dr Shadrach Dare, a Commonwealth Scholarship awardee from Ghana, co-founded the Dr Nana Gruer Health Initiative, an NGO, in 2015 with his PhD supervisor while he was studying at the University of Glasgow. Through fundraising activities, they have improved access to health care facilities and services in rural Ghana by providing motorcycles for healthcare staff to deliver home services, distributing food supplements for children, and offering clinical and logistical training for maternity care providers:

'Based on the response we heard two years ago, after donating two motorbikes, we found that the motorbikes were making a huge impact. The work with Dr Nana, the motorbikes, is serving a constituency of people who would otherwise not have access to healthcare. Last month, we donated five more motorbikes, and we had some tremendous responses from community leaders and the district health directors about the impact the motorbikes were making.' [37]

'Policy' was the second common theme associated with health-related impact reported at the institutional, local or national level, ranging from nutrition, sanitation, insurance, and non-communicable disease policy to youth-centred drug policy. An example of this is Commonwealth Distance Learning Commonwealth Alumnus Joab Tusaasire who led a research trial supporting the Ministry of Health in Uganda in recommending an appropriate dosage of the local ready-to-use therapeutic food to be administered to malnourished patients.

'The dosage that could bring out complete treatment of malnutrition was arrived at from these trials and this informed the Nutrition Assessment Counselling and Support (NACS) guidelines for the Ministry of Health.' [38]

Additionally, 'care', particularly palliative care, and 'training' emerged as another oft-mentioned theme. Alumni contributed to capacity-building activities by providing skills training to healthcare

[36] Commonwealth Scholarship Commission, *Equity and Access to Healthcare for Children and Marginalised Groups*.
[37] Commonwealth Scholarship Commission, *Improving Health Outcomes in Underserved Communities in Ghana*.
[38] Commonwealth Scholarship Commission, *Promoting Life-saving Health Interventions for Marginalised Communities in Uganda*.

professionals, pharmacists, and students, increasing awareness among community members, and nurturing them to become healthcare champions.

Figure 56 displays the reported impact on education, which was closely associated with 'school', 'students', 'children', 'community' and 'policy'. Although the impact occurred at different levels of education (including pre-primary, primary, secondary, and tertiary education), 'secondary education' was often mentioned in the comments concerning improving school access and quality education. For example, Commonwealth Alumnus Banduga Ismail worked with UNESCO to improve access to quality education in Uganda by influencing the development and implementation of the National Teacher Policy for Uganda. The policy has resulted in the establishment of the Teacher Management Information System (TMIS), facilitating teacher recruitment, registration, and management.

'The National Teacher Policy was approved by the Cabinet of Uganda in 2019 and it is now a published government policy that is being implemented by the Ministry of Education.' [39]

Figure 56 – Emerged themes of education-related impact

Source: Longitudinal Alumni Survey

[39] Commonwealth Scholarship Commission, *Equity and Access to Quality Education in Uganda*.

Moreover, there was a specific focus on child and girl education. Various educational topics such as health, hygiene, nutrition, sexuality, civic education, and language education were also addressed. The impact on education was mainly through a capacity-building approach. Alumni were involved in teaching students at schools, online, or universities, developing curriculum and teaching resources or providing training to teachers as teacher educators. At the Higher Teacher Training College (HTTC) in Cameron, Commonwealth Alumnus Dr Glory Enjong Mbah trained a total of 115 student teachers who have since become teachers themselves. She is also a pioneer member of the African Schools Outreach Programme organised by the International Veterinary Vaccinology Network to inspire the next generation of young female scientists across Africa:

'In 2021, an outreach training workshop was delivered to 160 students from United High School and Isanbi Comprehensive High School in Nigeria. In Kenya, 82 students were trained at Naivasha Secondary School. Following the training, Glory's Team mentored and offered career guidance talks to 1,000 schoolgirls at this school. In Loise Girls Secondary School, in Kenya a training workshop was conducted with 40 girls.' [40]

Additionally, respondents mentioned mentoring students from rural communities to support their access to education and their educational pursuits. Commonwealth Alumnus Babajide Milton Macaulay initiated a startup, Illumania, to reach out to talented students from low-income backgrounds and offer them study-abroad scholarship opportunities.

'Since 2018 to date, graduates of Nigerian universities applying for Master's/PhD scholarships abroad have probably tripled, and more than half of them are winning international scholarships at first or second attempt … In total, I was able to produce 250 scholarship winners across Africa in 4.5 years: attracting scholarship benefits of up to 10 million USD [as of publication in 2022].' [41]

[40] Commonwealth Scholarship Commission, *Bridging the Gender Gap in Education and Science in Cameroon*.
[41] Commonwealth Scholarship Commission, *Tackling Medical Waste in Nigeria and Widening Access to Tertiary Education*.

Figure 57 – Emerged themes of economic-related impact

Source: Longitudinal Alumni Survey

Figure 57 depicts the economic impact is closely associated with 'community' and 'policy'. Most economic activities and impacts were observed in remote and rural communities, with farming and fishing communities frequently mentioned in the comments. Alumni strongly supported small-scale, environmentally friendly and sustainable businesses, particularly in agriculture. Farmers, particularly smallholders and those from rural farming communities were frequently mentioned in the comments. For example, Commonwealth Alumnus Sidney Muhangi designed the Green Business Programme at the Ubunye Foundation, transforming smallholder farmers' livelihoods and business practices in the rural province of Eastern Cape, South Africa:

'While implementing the Programme, I facilitated in establishing over 200 sustainable smallholder businesses. These enterprises operate in an environmentally conscious manner. These are also a source of valuable skills and knowledge in business management and environmental stewardship for their owners. Furthermore, due to the Green Food Project initiative under the wider Green Business Programme, more

than 1,500 children now have uninterrupted access to fresh vegetables ensuring good health and well-being.' [42]

Alumni also expressed support for early-stage business development through establishing incubators, launching start-ups, and coaching entrepreneurs. Additionally, they provided vocational, entrepreneurship, and business management skills training programs or projects to improve trainees' employability, focusing on empowering economically disadvantaged youth, girls, and women. At Ressect, a start-up specialising in farming black soldier flies, Commonwealth Alumnus Proscovia Amondi Alando and her colleagues had trained 200 small-scale farmers in Kenya on the Black Fly Soldier (BSF) technology. They offered consultancy and facility set-up to farmers. Moreover, having experienced the weight of the burden for women to practice farming in Kenya, Proscovia has also been promoting the inclusion of women in fish farming by influencing policy in Kenya:

'We [Proscovia and colleagues] came together as one voice to make changes in policy. We developed a framework of policy reforms for the aquaculture industry, saying this is what challenges women and youths face in the industry, and shared it with the government ... We recommended the inclusion of the youth in value addition and providing technology to support aquaculture.' [43]

Their work gained the government's attention and a black soldier fly facility for a youth group farming fish was set up and implemented in partnership with the county government of Nakuru's Fisheries Department and the Agricultural Sector Development Support Program (ASDSPII).

[42] Commonwealth Scholarship Commission, *Protecting Livelihoods and Advancing Climate Change Literacy in Rural Uganda, South Africa, and Beyond*.
[43] Commonwealth Scholarship Commission, *Insect Technology for Sustainable Fish Farming and Waste Management in Kenya*.

Figure 58 – Emerged themes of environment-related impact

Source: Longitudinal Alumni Survey

Figure 58 underscores the environmental impact closely associated with the themes of 'community', 'climate change', and 'policy' themes. Alumni have actively implemented projects to mitigate and adapt to climate change, with these initiatives often including environmental management, such as biodiversity, water resources, forest conservation, and waste management. They also engaged in various forms of waste management, including the handling of solid, liquid, mining, wood, recycling, medical, and domestic waste. Furthermore, they promoted clean, renewable, and sustainable energy initiatives. In addition to these practical efforts, respondents also played a role in influencing policy matters related to climate change adaptation, renewable energy, beekeeping, wildlife, and agricultural policies. For example, Commonwealth Alumnus Dr Nicole Greenidge joined the Caribbean Disaster Emergency Management Agency (CDEMA), where she has applied the knowledge and skills honed through her doctoral research to inform the policies for strengthening resilience and response to natural and climate change threats in the Caribbean Region.

‘Given the technical strengths I honed in disaster management during my PhD study, I have supported the participating states to identify stronger evidence base for the development of policy, legislation and country strategies.’ [44]

[44] Commonwealth Scholarship Commission, *Laying the Foundations for Community Resilience to Disasters and Tackling Climate Change in the Caribbean Region*.

Another example is Commonwealth Alumnus George William Ilebo whose work spearheaded the establishment of Conservation International Liberia's Blue Oceans Programme (BOP) to conserve and restore marine and coastal ecosystem services.

'I have supported critical national policy processes such as Liberia's Low Carbon Development Strategy, the National Interpretation of the Round Table on Sustainable Palm Oil, REDD+ strategy, and revising Liberia's Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs).'[45]

His work with Conservation International has also influenced national and international environmental policy decisions.

Summary and Analysis

The evidence shows that Commonwealth Alumni report a degree of impact across all levels and spheres. In the context of reported impact spheres, Commonwealth Scholarships may particularly contribute to generating impact in the economic and policy spheres. Compared to the social, civic, and environmental spheres, where the reported impact fluctuated over time, an upward trend has been observed in the economic and policy spheres during the post-award period, contrasting with a downward trend among the Counterfactual respondents. However, the statistical analysis revealed a weak association between receiving Scholarships and impacting the policy sphere, at least at the two-year mark. This association indicates that policy impact may be partially contingent on receiving the Scholarships. In other words, policy impact might not have materialised if the recipients had not been awarded the Commonwealth Scholarships.

It is also important to note that the impact reported by Commonwealth Alumni is not confined to a single level or domain. Instead, it overlaps across levels and spheres, constituting a complex network of cross-level and inter-sphere interactions. For example, policy impact displays close associations with sectors such as health, education, economics, and the environment; impact stemming from local or institutional levels extends to the national or international arena. These interconnections underscore the intricate and dynamic nature of creating a sustainable development impact.

Statistical analysis suggests that Commonwealth Scholarships may not significantly contribute to differences in outcomes in sustainable development impact at the institutional or local level during the first four years post-Scholarship. Alumni and Counterfactual respondents reported similar trends in their impact over time. After the Baseline, the proportions of both groups reporting impact at this level dropped and recovered over time but only reached about the same level as the Baseline. Compared to the flattening trend in reporting impact at the institutional level, the percentages of those reporting impact at the local level from both groups continued to decline.

Commonwealth Scholarships may play a role in facilitating the impact at the national and international levels. Alumni reported a consistent upward trend in national and international impact

[45] Commonwealth Scholarship Commission, *Tackling Environmental Challenges in Liberia*.

over time, while the Counterfactual group indicated an overall downward trend. Moreover, despite a weak association, the statistical analysis showed a significant difference between these two groups in creating an impact at the international level at the two-year mark, further backing up that receiving the Scholarship can make a difference in creating an international impact even only two years removed from study.

Finally, it is acknowledged the limitations of using a self-reported approach to capture the impact. This impact is the change that respondents believe or perceive they have made through applying their knowledge, skills or research through their workplace, volunteering projects, and initiatives. The responses can be influenced by respondents' interpretations of the questions. Although respondents are asked to provide examples of their impact in the survey and invited some of them for interviews to gather further evidence to support their perceived impact, not all alumni do so. As a result, the analysis of development impact was mainly based on the assumption that participants provided genuine responses. Additionally, there is a limited understanding of whether receiving Scholarships makes a difference in the longer term due to the lack of comparable data from the Counterfactual group at the six, eight, and ten year follow-up points. However, ongoing data collection and analysis aim to address this limitation.

Summary and Findings

Overall, the CSC holds a strong evidence base to support both that the processes articulated in the Theory of Change are taking place, and that the programme is contributing to impacts in sustainable development.

Basic Programme Path

The Basic Programme path for the Theory of Change is the most straightforward. All Inputs are taken to support Scholars to participate in the CSC Development Training Programme and their Course of Study, which results in a Qualification, which enables Commonwealth Alumni to pursue Workplace and Volunteer Projects and Activities over the course of their career which leads to Sustainable Development Impact.

The supporting evidence to demonstrate that this pathway does indeed take place is very strong, with the exception of the evidence around the CSC Development Training Programme. As noted in Part Two, there is evidence showing that the sessions provided through this programme are of high-quality and that Scholars do learn important skills from it, however this evidence could be strengthened through additional data collection both about the programme itself, and how the skills learned specifically in those sessions are put into practice further along in alumni's careers. However, despite this one weakness the evidence supports the case that this pathway in the Theory of Change is both accurately conceptualised, and taking place in practice.

Skills and Knowledge Path

The Skills and Knowledge path reflects the learning that Commonwealth Scholars and Alumni do through the CSC Development Training Programme, their Course of Study, and Other CSC Engagement, and how that learning is used and applied in Workplace and Volunteer Projects and Activities in the service of Sustainable Development Impact.

Overall, this pathway has possibly the strongest evidence to support it, with two notable exceptions. There is strong evidence to show that Scholars receive high-quality educational opportunities through their Course of Study, that they see significant development to their Skills and Knowledge, that these Skills and Knowledge are then put to use in employment and non-employment contexts, that they use them in their Workplace and Volunteer Projects and Activities leading to Sustainable Development Impact.

The two exceptions where the evidence is not as strong are the CSC Development Training Programme and the Other CSC Engagement activities. Again as noted in Part Two, there is evidence to suggest that these activities are delivered to a high quality, and that Commonwealth Scholars and Alumni value them, however the overall base of evidence currently presented could be bolstered through additional data collection activities. It is important to note that there is no evidence that suggests that these components of the Skills and Knowledge pathway do not take place or that the pathway as conceptualised is not an accurate reflection of the process. However, additional investigation and data collection activities with respect to these two components would serve to strengthen the evidence base demonstrating the value of these activities.

Network Development Path

The Network Development Path reflects how Scholars build relationships and networks over the course of their Scholarship, particularly with contacts in the United Kingdom and other Commonwealth Scholars, Fellows, and Alumni. They do this through their Course of Study, and their participation in both the CSC Development Training Programme and Other CSC Engagement opportunities. Through the development and strengthening of these networks and relationships Commonwealth Alumni then have more opportunities to work with international partners on Workplace and Volunteer Projects and Activities that contribute to Sustainable Development Impact.

Once again there is strong evidence suggesting that this pathway as presented in the Theory of Change is both an accurate reflection of the process, and that it is taking place. While noting the general weakness of the evidence base around the CSC Development Training Programme and Other CSC Engagement that has been discussed previously, there is strong evidence to suggest that Commonwealth Scholars do develop their UK-based networks and relationships, and their relationships with Commonwealth Scholars, Fellows, and Alumni. This evidence is particularly strong given the divergence currently seen in the evidence between those who received Scholarships and those who did not in the Counterfactual.

Research Path

Finally, the Research Path shows how the research conducted by Scholars and Alumni feed into Sustainable Development Impact. The Research particularly conducted by Commonwealth Doctoral and Split-site Scholars during their Scholarship generates Research Findings which both generates Additional Research and can be used (along with the Additional Research) in the direct Application of Research Findings. These applications take the form of Workplace and Volunteer Projects and Activities which have Sustainable Development Impact.

There is strong evidence to support many aspects of this pathway. Scholars report that they have access to high quality and supportive research environments during their award, and for a strong majority of alumni their ongoing research is directly related to the research they conducted during their Scholarship. Three-fifths of alumni report continued research activities as a part of their employment and show strong engagement with the broader research community during their careers.

The one component of this pathway which is somewhat weaker is the Application of Research Findings. While there is evidence to suggest that alumni are applying their research findings in the founding of new businesses and activities, more could be done to investigate this link. The evidence presented for this component also touches on innovations and creation of new departments and organisations more broadly, suggesting that the Theory of Change could potentially be revised to reflect ‘Innovations’ in a more general sense.

Reflections and Future Actions

Overall, the Contribution Analysis has found strong evidence in support of the Theory of Change. While there are areas of weakness in the evidence, they are isolated and can be addressed through additional targeted data collection to investigate those areas further. On the whole, the Theory of Change stands up to scrutiny.

There are four areas of action that are suggested by the findings of this report with respect to data collection. First, the Counterfactual data set is still quite small, and additional data should be collected from this group. However, this is already taking place as the Counterfactual data collection is one of the core data collection activities done by the CSC annually. As additional data collection exercises take place, the number of respondents for both the year two and year four follow periods will grow, and data will begin to be collected for year six and onward.

The other three areas of action are to collect further data in relation to the three components of the Theory of Change where the evidence base was identified as weaker, namely the CSC Development Training Programme, Other CSC Engagement activities, and the Application of Research Findings. For each of these components additional data collection would serve to either further evidence that these aspects of the Theory of Change are taking place as postulated or show that revision to the Theory of Change is needed.

Finally, one additional action suggested by the Contribution Analysis is to revisit how the Application of Research Findings is conceptualised and evidenced. Currently the evidence base may be more suited to some form of 'Innovation' component that is not currently featured in the Theory of Change, and additional data collection could be warranted around the Application of Research Findings once this revision has taken place.

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Appendix A: Methodology and Data Sources

This appendix provides an overview of the Contribution Analysis methodology as well as the approaches used to analyse the data included in this report. It also provides a summary of the data sources used, including descriptions of the data collection processes and the number of respondents to different surveys.

Methodology

The over-arching methodology for this report is Contribution Analysis, underpinned by quantitative and qualitative analyses to assess the data and evidence. This subsection first provides a summary of the Contribution Analysis methodology, followed by a summary of the different approaches used to analyse the different types of evidence that have been included in the Contribution Analysis.

Contribution Analysis

As mentioned in the Introduction, the Contribution Analysis methodology was chosen as it aligned with both the evidence base that the CSC possesses and the nature of the intervention as an international scholarship programme. As per the HMG Magenta Book, Contribution Analysis is a 'step-by-step process used to examine if an intervention has contributed to an outcome by exploring a range of evidence for the Theory of Change. It gives an evidenced line of reasoning rather than definitive proof' and is appropriate in instances 'where it may not be possible to establish an experimental design testing cause and effect', as is the case for Commonwealth Scholarships.[46] The difficulty in assessing direct attribution for interventions based around international scholarships has been well-documented,[47] however as per the Magenta Book, Contribution Analysis can be used to establish a 'reasonable contribution causal claim' if:

- 'There is a reasoned Theory of Change for the intervention: the key assumptions behind why the intervention is expected to work make sense, are plausible, may be supported by evidence and/or existing research, and are agreed upon by at least some of the key players.'
- 'Activities of the intervention were implemented as per the Theory of Change.'
- 'The Theory of Change is supported by and confirmed by evidence on observed results and underlying assumptions – the chain of expected results occurred. The Theory of Change has not been disproved.'[48]

Contribution Analysis was first developed as a methodology by John Mayne, who described the process in 2008, noting:

[46] HMG Treasury, *Magenta Book; Central Government guidance on evaluation,* 45; HMG Treasury, *Magenta Book Annex A; Analytical methods for use within an evaluation*, 7.
[47] Mawer, "Approaches to Analyzing the Outcomes of International Scholarship Programs for Higher Education".
[48] HMG Treasury, *Magenta Book Annex A; Analytical methods for use within an evaluation*, 7.

'When it is not practical to design an experiment to assess performance, Contribution Analysis can provide credible assessments of cause and effect. Verifying the Theory of Change that the programme is based on, and paying attention to other factors that may influence the outcomes, provides reasonable evidence about the contribution being made by the programme.'[49]

Mayne also laid out the six-step process which comprises a Contribution Analysis as:

- Step 1: Set out the attribution problem to be addressed
- Step 2: Develop a Theory of Change and risks to it
- Step 3: Gather the existing evidence on the theory of change
- Step 4: Assemble and assess the contribution story, and challenges to it
- Step 5: Seek out additional evidence
- Step 6: Revise and strengthen the contribution story[50]

It is important to note that Contribution Analysis is intended as an iterative process, whereby Step 4 includes a critical assessment of the strength and weaknesses of the evidence base and the underlying Theory of Change, with evaluators then seeking to further investigate identified areas of weaknesses in the evidence base in Step 5, and then revisiting the contribution story in Step 6 before returning to Step 4 for further iterations.

This report specifically addresses Steps 3 and 4 as described above, as Steps 1 and 2 have already been achieved through other activities. The development of a Theory of Change as covered by Step 2 was done as a distinct activity which resulted in an overarching narrative report in 2021 that describes the CSC's Theory of Change and which underpins this report (and is covered in more detail in the 'Background' section which follows this one). Step 3 was accomplished using the 'Data Sources' and 'Reports and Outputs' tables that were generated as a part of the development of the narrative report to identify the most up-to-date and relevant data sources to be used as evidence, as described in the previous 'Data Sources' subsection of this report. That data has then been analysed using several techniques described below.

Upon completing those analyses, as per Step 4 the evidence produced for each section of the Theory of Change has been assessed for its strengths and weaknesses and the extent to which that evidence supports the process that has been described in the Theory of Change. The final section of this report then takes a holistic account of those assessments and summarises the overall strengths and weaknesses of the CSC's current evidence base, areas where additional evaluation activities would prove fruitful, and the extent to which the processes described by the Theory of Change hold up or could benefit from revision. The activities describe in Steps 5 and 6 of the Contribution Analysis methodology will then take place after the completion of this report.

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[49] Mayne, *Contribution analysis: An approach to exploring cause and effect*, 1.
[50] Ibid.

Descriptive Statistics

Much of the data featured in this report has been analysed quantitatively using descriptive statistics, as necessitated by the survey design. The main focus of this analysis has been to summarise response frequencies to survey questions, with particular emphasis on the proportional breakdown of responses. For example, as is discussed above through its Longitudinal Surveys the CSC has collected years of data measuring a wide variety of outcomes related to its Scholarships. In this report, descriptive statistical analysis has been employed to examine the trends in the data over the Baseline and Follow-up periods. In the case of variables with binary response data (i.e. Yes/No questions), descriptive statistics show the proportion of Alumni responding 'Yes' in each survey year. The Longitudinal Survey also collects data using various Likert scales. Examples include questions relating to the frequency with which Alumni engage in a given activity, with responses ranked on four-point scales from 'All the time' to 'Never', or questions relating to the quality of an activity, ranked on five-point scales from 'Excellent' to 'Very Poor'. In the case of Likert scales, descriptive statistics are employed to show the combined proportion of Alumni selecting the top two response options, e.g. 'All the time' and 'Often'.

Up to the year four point in the Follow-up period, the CSC also collects equivalent data for a Counterfactual cohort, as is discussed above. The Alumni and Counterfactual data have been processed in the same way, enabling comparisons between the two cohorts. The data collected through the Scholar Experience Survey has also been similarly processed to allow for the visualisation of trends over time.

Comparative Statistics

While the quantitative analysis in this report is mostly descriptive, in a few instances comparative statistical analysis has also been conducted between the Scholarship Recipient and Counterfactual data sets to determine whether there are significant differences between them. Given the variables are nominal or categorical in nature, and the data is recorded as frequencies, the chi-square test for independence was employed. This test was also chosen as it can accommodate the imbalance in the sample sizes for the two cohorts of respondents. This test was conducted for the two-year and four-year data points only, as the CSC does not hold Counterfactual data beyond this point, as mentioned in the previous section on data sources. It should also be noted that in some cases, the number of responses from the Counterfactual cohort was insufficient to support a chi-squared test; in these cases, results have either been caveated within the report, or testing has not been conducted.

Thematic Analyses

The Longitudinal Alumni Survey, the Counterfactual Survey and the Scholar Experience Survey all collect qualitative data via open free text survey questions. These questions allow respondents to answer in their own words and provide particularly useful and more nuanced insights in relation to individual experiences, such as the Scholars' overall view of the scheme or the best and worst aspects of their experiences living and studying in the United Kingdom.

For these questions, a qualitative thematic analysis has been conducted. For each question, all free text responses were reviewed and grouped according to common themes that Scholarship recipients have consistently raised across survey years. This allows for the discussion of patterns in the data where Scholars consistently raised the same points across multiple years. In some

instances, these responses were also analysed for word frequency and visualised using word clouds.

Software Used

All survey work was done using the Snap Surveys platform. Most data work and analysis was conducted using Microsoft Excel, with thematic analyses done using both Excel and NVivo. No Artificial Intelligence platform was used in any part of the analysis stage, however Microsoft Copilot was used during the copy-editing stage in order to shorten a handful of subsections to improve flow and readability. All outputs from Microsoft Copilot were reviewed and edited by the research team prior to inclusion in the final report.

Limitations

There are a number of limitations to this analysis that must be acknowledged when considering the findings of the report. First and foremost, the analysis was conducted in a way that did not interrogate important subsets within the data, including the gender, country of origin, and subject of study of respondents. Furthermore, Commonwealth Scholarships are offered through five different schemes, each offering different opportunities to pursue degree types (Master's or PhD) and modes of study (including via distance learning, and a split-site option). So while the data analysis treats alumni respondents as a general group broken down by response year, with a focus on changes over time, this could potentially be masking variations within these other subsets.

The second limitation of note is the small number of respondents in certain data sets. This is most prevalent for the Counterfactual Follow-up, particularly the four-year mark data. This is a function of both the long-term nature of the data collection within the Counterfactual grouping, and attrition among respondents as they progress through the data collection framework. As noted above, respondents within this grouping had to be recruited through the Baseline and maintain participation as they progressed through the framework. At the time of analysis, only two cohorts had reached the four-year data collection point, which combined with attrition has meant that are a smaller number of responses for this subset, and so any conclusions related to this group should be treated as tentative.

A final limitation which should be noted is that this was an internal analysis that was conducted by the CSC's evaluation team, and internal analyses have an inherent risk of bias. While every effort has been taken to approach the data and analysis in a detached, critical, and reflexive manner to mitigate against potential bias, this limitation must still be acknowledged due to the potential risk.

Data Sources

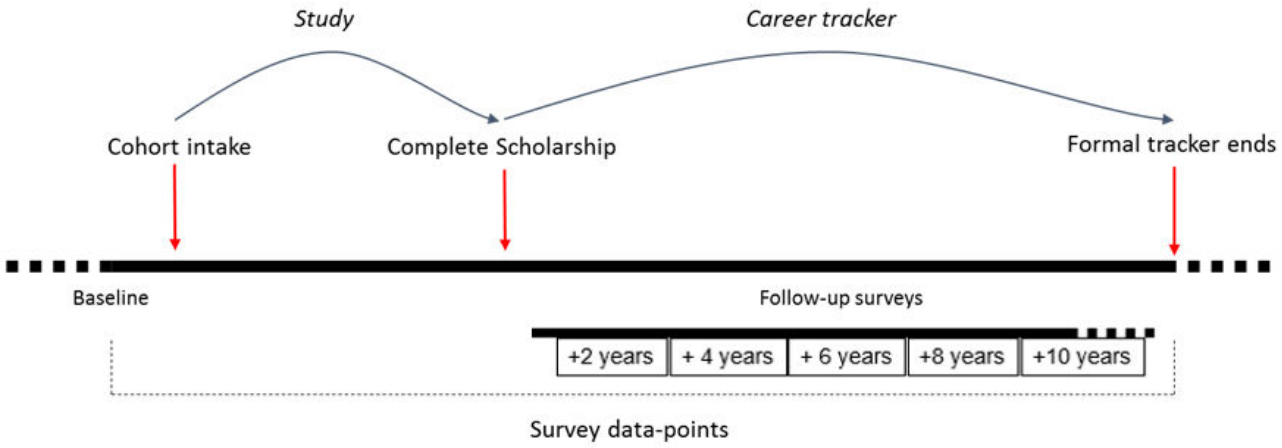
The CSC generates several data sets and reports through its ongoing programme delivery, reporting, and evaluation functions. At the time of analysis, the most recently available data sources and reports were used to source the data. A brief summary of these data sources is provided below, including overall respondent counts and the average response rates for surveys.

For all charts throughout this report, a reference to the data source is provided with it, however specific respondent counts for each chart have been omitted for the sake of simplicity.

Longitudinal Baseline and Alumni Surveys

Introduced in 2016, the Longitudinal Baseline and Alumni Surveys underpin the majority of the CSC's data collection efforts when it comes to evaluating the impact of its programmes. The Baseline Survey is sent to all incoming Scholars prior to the start of their study, while the Alumni Surveys are sent to Commonwealth Alumni at regular intervals after the completion of their studies. These intervals are every two years post-study, starting at two years after the completion of their studies and up to and including ten years post-study.

Figure 59 – Longitudinal Data Collection Timeline



The overall number of data sets associated with each data point of the longitudinal survey are provided in the table below. However it is worth noting that for some questions there are fewer responses due to conditional pathways in the surveys, questions which were not mandatory, or questions being introduced to the surveys after 2016 to collect data in new areas of interest.

Table 1 – Longitudinal Baseline and Alumni Survey response numbers

Survey	Total number of respondents	Average response rate
Longitudinal Baseline	3,990	73%
Longitudinal Alumni – Year +2	1,901	38%
Longitudinal Alumni – Year +4	1,372	28%
Longitudinal Alumni – Year +6	1,058	23%
Longitudinal Alumni – Year +8	798	20%
Longitudinal Alumni – Year +10	582	17%

Counterfactual Baseline and Follow-up Surveys

The Counterfactual Baseline and Follow-up Surveys were also introduced in 2016 and serve as a complimentary data set to the Longitudinal Baseline and Alumni Surveys by asking a group of comparable non-recipients the same questions contained in the Longitudinal Surveys. The specific wording of the questions is the same, however there are some questions contained in the Longitudinal Surveys that are not asked of the Counterfactual group as they are specific to having

studied on a Commonwealth Scholarship. These surveys are also timed to align with their Longitudinal counterparts.

Another difference between the Counterfactual and Longitudinal surveys is that due to the need to secure initial and ongoing consent from participants for each round, there are currently only data points for the Counterfactual Baseline and the year two and year four follow-up surveys. The number of data sets associated with each phase of the Counterfactual Survey stream are provided in the table below, however the same qualifications apply to the response counts as detailed above for the Longitudinal Surveys.

Table 2 – Counterfactual Baseline and Follow-up Survey response numbers

Survey	Total number of respondents	Average response rate
Counterfactual Baseline	919	37%
Counterfactual Follow-up – Year +2	147	29%
Counterfactual Follow-up – Year +4	22	28%

Scholar Experience Surveys

Scholar Experience Surveys are annual surveys that are conducted with on-award Scholars who are currently studying in the United Kingdom. The questions in this survey cover several areas related to studying and living in the United Kingdom and the administrative support that they receive from the CSC and their university of study.

Table 3 – Scholar Experience Survey response numbers

Survey Year	Total number of respondents	Response rate
2018	525	64%
2019	540	66%
2020	554	67%
2021	443	60%
2022	461	58%
2023	467	61%

Case Studies

The CSC has produced 26 evaluation case studies based on key informant interviews with individual Commonwealth Alumni.[51] These case studies provide tangible examples of how the Theory of Change comes to pass in practice, featuring the impact that alumni have had through

[51] "CSC Case Studies", Commonwealth Scholarship Commission in the UK, accessed 24 July 2026, https://cscuk.fcdo.gov.uk/csc-case-studies/.

their work, and their reflections on how their Commonwealth Scholarship experience has contributed to their personal and professional journey.

Annual Reports

As a part of its governance and reporting responsibilities, the CSC produces an annual report that is laid in parliament and provides a public record of its activities.[52] These reports provide a comprehensive overview of the CSC's activities during the previous reporting year, detailing how the programme was delivered and include key information such as funding levels, scholar numbers, and performance indicators.

Programme Management Data

Through the delivery of its programme, the CSC generates a range of internal programme management data. This includes figures on the number of applicants and nominations across its various schemes, participation levels in engagement and training activities for Scholars and alumni, as well as responses from feedback surveys.

Other Data Sources

This report also draws on data and evidence presented in other evaluation reports produced by the CSC, particularly those assessing specific Commonwealth Scholarship schemes. These include evaluations of the Commonwealth Doctoral Scholarship, [53] the Commonwealth Split-site Scholarship,[54] the Commonwealth Distance Learning Scholarship,[55] and the Commonwealth Professional Fellowships Programme.[56]

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[52] "Commonwealth Scholarship Commission: annual reports", GOV.UK, accessed 24 July 2026, https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/csc-annual-reports.
[53] Day et al, *Commonwealth Doctoral Scholarship 1960 – 2015*.
[54] Harrison et al, *Building Bridges: The Commonwealth Split-Site Doctoral Scholarship Programme 1998-2018*.
[55] Harrison et al, *Expanding Horizons: The Commonwealth Distance Learning Scholarship Programme*.
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