

AN UNCOMMON ASSOCIATION A WEALTH OF POTENTIAL

FINAL REPORT OF THE COMMONWEALTH CONVERSATION



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The Royal Commonwealth Society
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ABOUT THIS REPORT

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This report presents the full findings of the Commonwealth Conversation, a public consultation about the future of the Commonwealth run by the Royal Commonwealth Society (RCS) from July 2009 to March 2010.

It has been written by an RCS team comprising Joanna Bennett (Communications Manager), Dhananjayan Sriskandarajah (Director) and Zoë Ware (Commonwealth Affairs Manager). Project assistance was provided by Anushya Devendra and Alex Try.

The RCS is grateful to the UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) for their financial support and to countless people around the Commonwealth who have devoted considerable amounts of time, often on a voluntary basis, to making this undertaking a success.

The views expressed in this report are those of its authors and do not necessarily reflect those of the Trustees or Members of the RCS, or of the FCO.

Defining the Commonwealth

Given its long history and changing nature, 'the Commonwealth' is not always easy to define. In this report and throughout the Commonwealth Conversation, we have tried to be clear which aspect of the Commonwealth is being referred to, including:

Member States: All 54 countries that are members of the Commonwealth

Intergovernmental Commonwealth: The Commonwealth's official organs funded by and serving member states (Commonwealth Secretariat, Commonwealth Foundation and Commonwealth of Learning)

Commonwealth Civil Society organisations: The non-governmental organisations that work to promote the Commonwealth, often accredited to the inter-governmental Commonwealth. For a comprehensive list see: www.thecommonwealth.org

Commonwealth 'family': All organisations, member governments and peoples who work on Commonwealth issues



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Organisations

Association of Commonwealth Universities
BBC World
British Council
British Council Kenya
British Council Tanzania
British Council Zimbabwe
British Youth Council
Chancellor College, Malawi
CM Insight
Commonwealth Broadcasting Association
Commonwealth Business Council
Commonwealth Foundation
Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative
Commonwealth Journalists Association India
Commonwealth Parliamentary Association Canada
Commonwealth Parliamentary Association UK
Commonwealth People's Association of Uganda
Commonwealth Policy Studies Unit
Commonwealth Scholarships Commission
Commonwealth Secretariat
Commonwealth Student Welfare Group of India
Commonwealth Trust, Wellington (RCS Branch)
Commonwealth Youth Exchange Council
Commonwealth Youth Organisation of Nigeria
Commonwealth Youth Programme
Dept of Political Studies, University of Cape Town
Foreign and Commonwealth Office, UK
Global Rights
Institute of Commonwealth Studies
Hope Enterprises Ltd, Jamaica
Luvei Viti Community Group, New Zealand
Institute of Security Studies, South Africa
I-TECH Namibia
Institute of International Relations, UWI, Trinidad
Institute of International Studies, New Zealand
Media Initiative for Public Policy, Bangladesh
Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, New Zealand
Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Maldives
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One Tree Hill College, Auckland
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Phat Reaction
RCS Auckland Branch
RCS Bath Branch
RCS Cambridge Branch
RCS Cameroon Branch

RCS Canberra Branch
RCS Honorary Representative, Cayman Islands
RCS Ottawa Branch
RCS Queensland Branch
RCS Saskatchewan Branch
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1. INTRODUCTION

In March 2009, to coincide with Commonwealth Day, the Royal Commonwealth Society conducted a nationally representative opinion poll in the UK to gauge the Commonwealth's profile and reputation. Its results were alarming, but many people at the time told us the outlook was far bleaker in the UK than elsewhere. To put this oft cited theory to the test, we set about conducting six more opinion polls in Australia, Canada, India, Jamaica, Malaysia and South Africa. The results, published as part of the launch of the Commonwealth Conversation on 20 July 2009, did little to assuage our fears.

Across these countries, we unearthed indifference and ignorance. The misperceptions and scepticism surrounding the Commonwealth seemed to point towards some deep-seated challenges and, in the association's 60th anniversary year, we wanted to determine what they were. It was with this in mind that we embarked upon our consultation.

The main aims of the Conversation were:

- To gather views about the Commonwealth and its future
- To identify key issues on which the Commonwealth should focus
- To develop recommendations to present to Commonwealth leaders and policymakers
- To help revitalise the Commonwealth and reconnect it to a new generation
- To raise awareness about the Commonwealth

In the pursuit of these aims, we adopted a wide range of online and offline consultation methods (for full details see Section 2 on Methodology) and deliberately set out to engage with the broadest cross section of participants, including members of the public, government officials, opinion leaders and Commonwealth experts.

After four months, in November 2009, we published our emerging findings ahead of the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) in Trinidad and Tobago. We called our report '*Common What?*' (available to download from our [website](#)). The title echoed a phrase used by two participants in the Conversation: a journalist in South Africa and a Jamaican businesswoman in the UK. Both told us that, if they were to ask their friends and colleagues how relevant the Commonwealth was to them, this is the response they would get. The phrase also seemed to capture much of what we had found by that stage, including a widespread lack of awareness about what the modern Commonwealth is and an uncertainty about what exactly its member states have in common that sets the association apart from other international groupings.

In trying to understand the reasons for the Commonwealth's low profile, in our emerging findings, we identified several key challenges. We characterised these as the 3 Ps: principles, priorities and people. If the Commonwealth were to renew its focus on these three areas, we argued, it would rebuild its profile and become a stronger, healthier association, better equipped to prosper in the 21st century. We emphasised that the whole Commonwealth family, from member states to inter-governmental institutions, to civil society, shared a responsibility for this revitalisation.

Our emerging findings were provocative and unashamedly so. We deliberately did not tone down what we had heard (nor did we pick the most sensationalist or critical comments as some people suggested at the time). We felt that we had a duty to accurately record what we had been told, even if it made for uncomfortable reading. But we also chose not to tone down our findings because we urgently wanted people to sit up and take notice. We believed that what we were hearing was of huge importance to anyone who cared about the Commonwealth's future and it should not be allowed to slip quietly under the radar.

We also wanted people to engage with and respond to our earliest findings. This was one reason why we decided to publish them just before CHOGM, the largest biennial gathering of the Commonwealth family. Since then, we have conducted a further three months of consultation,

focusing in particular on the feedback Commonwealth 'insiders' gave us to '*Common What?*'.

We now draw the exercise to a close with the publication of this full and final Commonwealth Conversation report. A short summary of these final recommendations has also been produced.

We do not pretend that the Conversation was exhaustive. However, it has been the biggest public consultation about the Commonwealth ever undertaken. While we have heard much to give us hope, we have also heard more than enough to give us grave cause for concern. Even if one takes a sceptical view of our research (that we only reached a few thousand internet savvy people in the Commonwealth's more developed countries), this still shows that a proportion of the Commonwealth's peoples are unconvinced of the vibrancy and effectiveness of the association. These concerns alone, we believe, should be enough to provoke a response from anyone who cares about the Commonwealth's future.

But we would never have begun this process if we did not firmly believe that the future of the Commonwealth is one worth investing in; that this remarkable association is something worth fighting for. At the end of the Conversation, we are more convinced than ever that the Commonwealth has all the ingredients to be a leading, influential and effective international association in the 21st century. This is why we have titled this report '*An Uncommon Association; A Wealth of Potential*'.

While the Conversation has been a useful exercise in encouraging greater awareness and discussion of the Commonwealth, its real purpose has been to stimulate substantive change and long-term reform. This is not about producing an interesting report and leaving it there. The ten recommendations that follow our methodology section are intended to set out a constructive way forward for the whole Commonwealth family.



2. METHODOLOGY

What we did

From July 2009 to March 2010, the Commonwealth Conversation reached out to tens of thousands of people from all corners of the world. The success of the Conversation as a public consultation rested on its ability to reach a large number of people, from a wide range of nationalities, backgrounds, professions and ages. It was as important to consult widely with people who had no idea about the Commonwealth as it was to talk to those who had spent years working in the Commonwealth family. Given the diversity of countries in the Commonwealth, this was a significant challenge, especially considering the time and resource constraints. However, we feel that the methods we used, while by no means exhaustive, enabled us to gather an accurate cross-section of both informed and uninformed global opinion about the Commonwealth in eight short months.

THE HIGHLIGHTS

Over eight months from July 2009 to March 2010 we:

- Conducted nationally representative opinion polls in 7 Commonwealth countries with a combined sample of 6,200
- Had nearly 45,000 visits to our website and social media pages from 189 countries, including virtually all Commonwealth countries
- Gathered 2,000+ comments via the website, email and post
- Surveyed 1,200 people, including key opinion leaders, in over 40 countries
- Facilitated 87 events in 26 Commonwealth countries across all regions involving almost 4,000 people
- Convened 11 expert groups on key aspects of the Commonwealth's work
- Organised 2 bespoke online focus groups involving 31 students from 9 countries in all Commonwealth regions
- Generated extensive coverage in leading media outlets around the Commonwealth including 24 op-ed pieces and interviews
- Received over 350 entries to the 'My Commonwealth' youth competition from under 25 year olds in 24 countries

1. Surveys

1.1 PUBLIC OPINION POLLS

To launch the Conversation, we conducted opinion polls to test awareness about the Commonwealth in Australia, Canada, Great Britain, India, Jamaica, Malaysia and South Africa. People were asked a series of similar questions about what they knew and thought of the Commonwealth.

The details of the survey methodology are as follows:

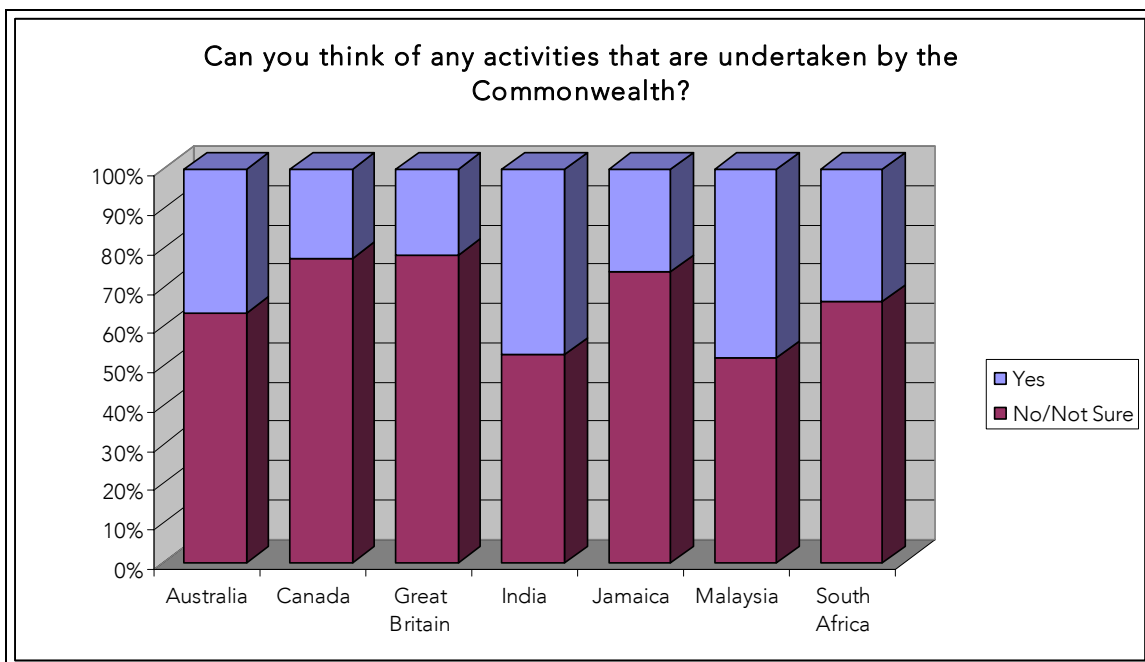
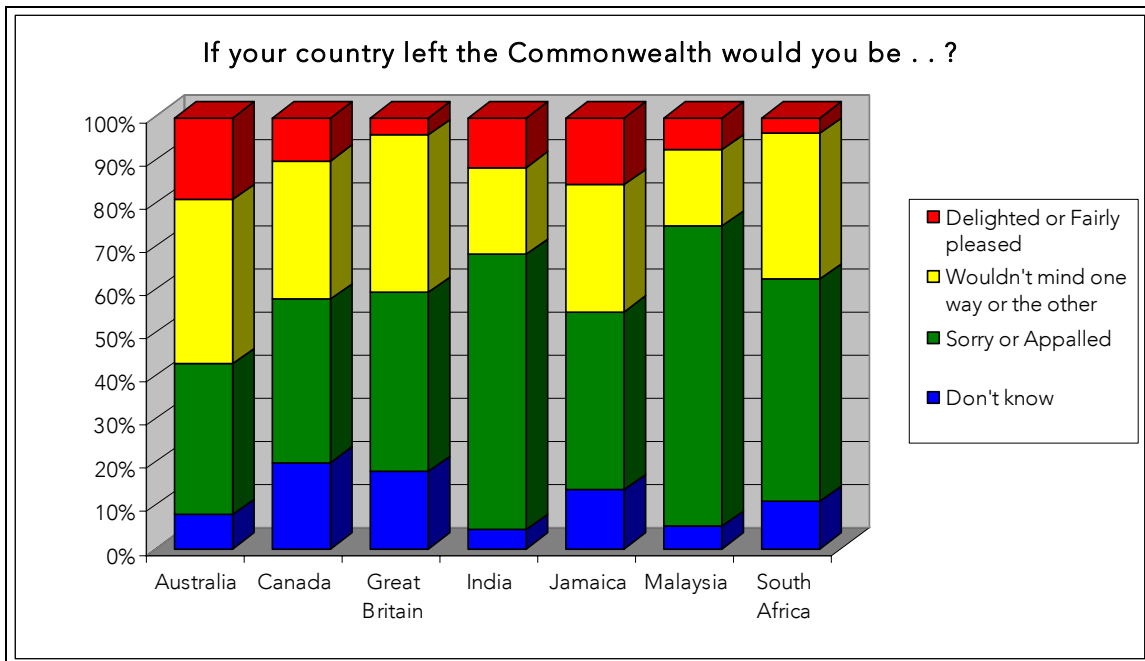
Country	Polling Agency	Fieldwork dates	Sample size
Australia	YouGov Plc	26 June – 2 July 2009	1020
Canada	YouGov Plc	1 July – 7 July 2009	1020
Great Britain	YouGov Plc	2 March – 4 March 2009	2119
India	YouGov Plc	26 June – 3 July 2009	520
Jamaica	Hope Enterprises Ltd.	29 June – 10 July 2009	500
Malaysia	YouGov Plc	1 July – 13 July	514
South Africa	YouGov Plc	2 July – 8 July 2009	510

All surveys were sampled and weighted to be representative of the adult population of each country. However, all the results were based on a sample and were therefore subject to the statistical errors that are normally associated with sample-based information.

The detailed poll results, including a break down by gender and age, are included in **Annex 1**. A few of the key poll findings are as follows:

- On average, people in developing countries are twice as likely to think the Commonwealth is important compared to developed countries.
- Only about a third of Australians or Canadians would be sorry or appalled if their country left the Commonwealth, compared to two-thirds of Indians and Malaysians.
- Indians value the Commonwealth more than America or South Asia. South Africans value it more than America or Africa. Yet Canadians are four times more likely to value America higher, Australians are twice as likely to value Asia more, and Britons place the Commonwealth a distant third behind Europe and America. In general, of all the countries polled, the Commonwealth was least valued in Great Britain.
- Only a third of people polled could name any activity the Commonwealth did, and most of those people listed the Commonwealth Games.
- Only half of people polled knew the Queen was the head of the Commonwealth. A quarter of Jamaicans think President Barack Obama is head and one in ten Indians and South Africans think Kofi Annan is head.
- When asked who the next head of the Commonwealth should be, the most popular answer, given by over a third of people, was that the head should rotate between all member countries.
- Older generations in Canada think the organisation is more valuable to their country than young people (43% versus 27%). But this trend is not repeated in Australia (57% to 62%), Malaysia (49% to 61%) or South Africa (37% to 43%) where young people are more enthusiastic about the significance of the Commonwealth.

- Women seem to view the Commonwealth as more important than their male counterparts. When asked which region or world grouping they thought most important to their country, 27% of Australian women responded 'the Commonwealth' compared with only 18% of men. The same was seen in India (47% to 33%) and Malaysia (41% to 24%).



1.2 OPINION LEADERS' SURVEY

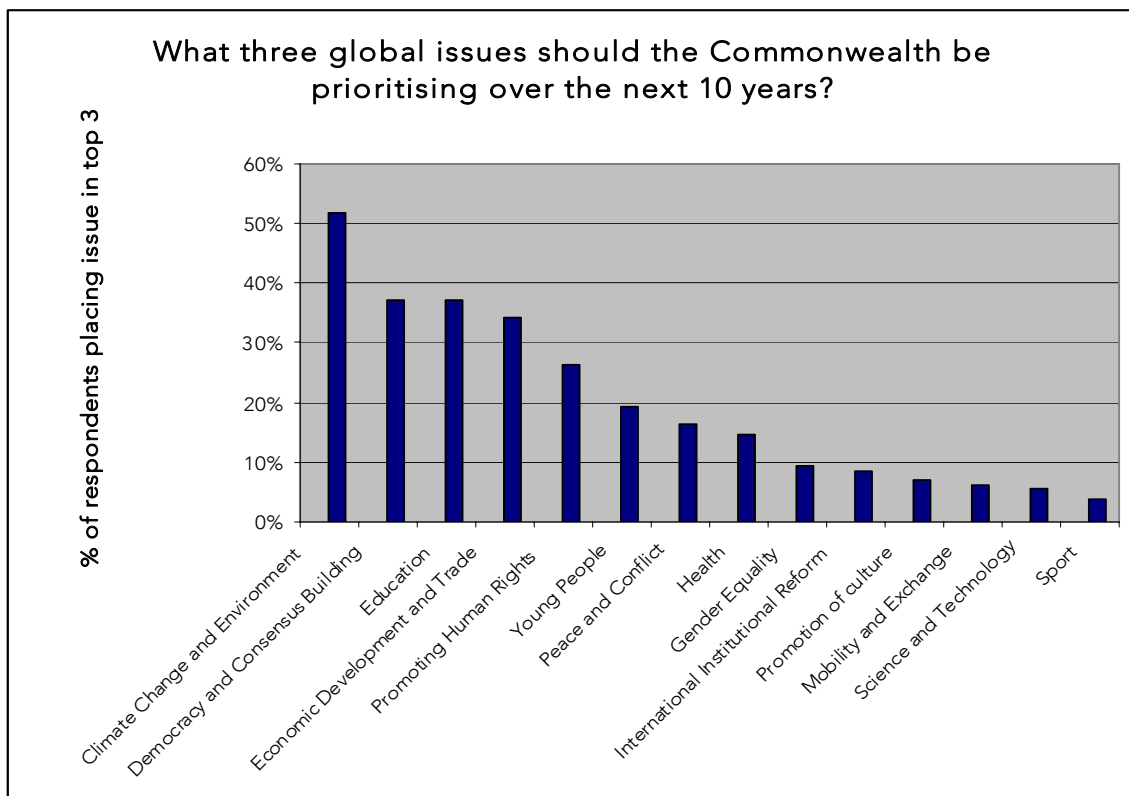
In order to make sure we captured the views of opinion formers around the Commonwealth, we commissioned a bespoke opinion leaders' survey. The aim was specifically to contact people who had no direct connection with the Commonwealth but who were leaders in their respective fields.

A specialist researcher helped us to identify key figures from around the Commonwealth in the following fields: academia, media, social policy, faith, government, business, civil society, inter-

governmental organisations, law and development. In addition, we also contacted Commonwealth Parliamentary Association branches worldwide who were helpful in encouraging their members to participate. The survey was conducted primarily online through Survey Monkey, though the majority of parliamentarians completed it in hard copy. In total, we received 146 responses from opinion leaders in 39 Commonwealth countries.

The results of the opinion leaders' survey were some of the most interesting that that we received. A few of the highlights were:

- When asked 'What does the Commonwealth mean to you?' the most common answers were: empire or colonialism; history; friendship, collaboration or warmth; and Britain.
- 61% of those surveyed said they thought the Commonwealth was viewed positively in their countries, and 39% said they thought people were indifferent to it.
- When asked what the Commonwealth's core strengths are, the most common answers were: good governance, democracy and human rights; the diversity of its membership; its cultural, social and religious diversity; its emphasis on collaboration and dialogue; and its shared language.
- When asked what the Commonwealth's greatest weaknesses are, the most common answers were: the poor public demonstration of its value; a lack of publicity; the need to better defend its values on an international stage; and the pursuit of too many diverging interest areas and goals.
- The most popular global issues that opinion leaders thought the Commonwealth should prioritise over the next 10 years were: climate change and environment; education; democracy and consensus building; and economic development and trade.



1.3 QUESTIONNAIRES

To supplement the polling and the opinion leaders' survey, we asked the organisers of Conversation events worldwide to distribute questionnaires to participants wherever possible. The questions varied slightly according to the location and target group, but were predominantly the same as those asked during the other two surveys. Over 400 people took the time to fill in these questionnaires, from

countries as diverse as Nigeria, India, Malawi, Malaysia and Canada.

In addition to event questionnaires, we also encouraged people using the Conversation website to complete the survey online using Survey Monkey. Over 600 people took this survey during the Conversation, from 43 countries and territories worldwide. (This survey can still be taken online at www.thecommonwealthconversation.org/survey/).

Some of the distinctive findings from these questionnaires were as follows:

- A quarter of people who took the survey think the Commonwealth is the most important region for their country
- 56% of people who took the survey think the Commonwealth is viewed positively in their countries
- When asked what issues the Commonwealth should be addressing in the 21st century, the most popular responses were education and climate change

2. Online activities

2.1 WEBSITE

The centrepiece of the Conversation was the consultation's interactive website www.thecommonwealthconversation.org. The following is an overview of the key website statistics and features from its launch on 20 July 2009 to the end of the Conversation in March 2010. We are grateful to Phat Reaction for the technical design and support in creating the website.

The screenshot shows the homepage of the Commonwealth Conversation website. At the top, there is a navigation bar with links for 'HOME | RCS HOMEPAGE', 'Contact Us', and 'RSS Feed'. The main header features the 'The Commonwealth Conversation' logo, which includes the letters 'RCS' in a circular emblem, and the text 'HOSTED BY THE ROYAL COMMONWEALTH SOCIETY'. Below the header is a secondary navigation bar with four colored tabs: 'ABOUT THE CONVERSATION' (red), 'THE DEBATE' (blue), 'EVENTS' (green), and 'ABOUT THE COMMONWEALTH' (black). The main content area is divided into several sections. On the left, a sidebar titled 'What's on the site' lists various categories like 'About the Commonwealth', 'About the Conversation', 'Director's Blog', 'Events', 'Get Involved', 'My Commonwealth Competition', 'Press Highlights', 'Survey', 'The Debate', and 'Useful Links'. Below this is a 'Facebook' widget for the Royal Commonwealth Society. The central part of the page features a large yellow banner with a red paperclip icon, containing the text: 'The largest, global dialogue ever undertaken between the peoples of the Commonwealth about their association... This is the Commonwealth Conversation. Your chance to have your voice heard; your chance to shape your Commonwealth. Two billion people. 53 countries. One conversation. Join in!'. Below the banner is an article titled 'Draft Commonwealth Conversation Recommendations' by ZoeWare, dated 11th February 2010, with 46 comments. The article text begins: 'As we near the end of the Conversation, we have begun to draft 10 key recommendations based on all that we have heard. What do you think? Let us know by giving each slide a 'thumbs up' or 'thumbs down', or leaving a longer comment at the bottom of the page. Continue reading...'. To the right of the article is a 'Key Posts' section listing 'BBC WORLD DEBATE', 'DOWNLOAD EMERGING FINDINGS', 'LEADERS HEED FINDINGS', and 'POLL RESULTS'. Below that is a poll titled 'What do you think? Commonwealth Day is celebrated annually on the second Monday of March. Does it mean anything to you?'. The poll results are: 'Yes (47%)', 'No (27%)', and 'What is Commonwealth Day?! (26%)'. There is also a 'Polls Archive' link. At the bottom right, a 'Topics of Debate' section lists: 'Climate Change & Environment (17)', 'Connecting with Young People (20)', 'Conversation Events (38)', 'Democracy & Good Governance (18)', and 'Director's Blog (15)'. A 'Stay Updated: RSS 2.0' link is located below the article.

- The website and associated pages received 44,000 visits. This figure includes all visitors to www.thecommonwealthconversation.org. It also includes additional viewers of Conversation videos on the RCS's YouTube page, viewers of the online debates (see point 2.4 below), and viewers of the specific Conversation page on the Chevening Scholars Alumni network website.
- Visits came from 189 countries and territories, including virtually all Commonwealth countries. The highest volume of visitors came from the UK, Canada, the US, India, Australia, Trinidad & Tobago and Malaysia.
- The website achieved a Google page rank of 7, and had over 120 incoming links from well-regarded sources. We used search engine optimisation techniques and limited online advertising to ensure the website had the best possible web-presence.
- 182 'Conversation starters' (discussion stimulators) and reports from Conversation events worldwide were posted under the following topics:

Climate Change and Environment	Connecting with Young People
Conversation Events	Democracy and Good Governance
Director's Blog	Economic Development
Education	Health
Historical Legacy	Human Rights
Mobility and Exchange	My Commonwealth
Peace and Conflict	Sport
The Commonwealth's Relevance	The Official Commonwealth

The most viewed topics were human rights, director's blog, climate change and environment, commonwealth relevance, and My Commonwealth.

- A number of key figures from around the Commonwealth were interviewed as part of the Conversation. Some of the highlights included:
 - British athlete, [Kelly Holmes](#)
 - Former President of Zambia, Kenneth Kaunda and former Prime Minister of Australia, [Malcolm Fraser](#)
 - Pakistani cricketer and politician, [Imran Khan](#)
 - South African musician, [Albert Mazibuko](#) (Ladysmith Black Mambazo)
 - UK Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary, [David Miliband](#)
 - Jamaican-British trade union leader, [Bill Morris](#)
 - Sri Lankan cricketer, [Muttiah Muralitharan](#)
 - President of the Maldives, [Mohammed Nasheed](#)
 - British comedian and traveller, [Michael Palin](#)
 - Former Commonwealth Secretary-General, [Sonny Ramphal](#)
 - Indian Commonwealth Secretary-General, [Kamalesh Sharma](#)
 - Australian Foreign Minister, [Stephen Smith](#)
 - Prime Minister of Zimbabwe, [Morgan Tsvangirai](#)
 - Trinidad and Tobago footballer, [Dwight Yorke](#)

- The Conversation starters which had received the most comments at the time of writing were:

	Conversation Starter	Comments
1	Co founder of the New Zealand Republican Movement says: "Queen Elizabeth should abdicate her position as head of the Commonwealth"	92
2	What should the Commonwealth be doing on Sri Lanka	72
3	John Howard Interview: "Southern African countries let everybody down on Zimbabwe"	58
4	The Commonwealth without a monarch is inconceivable	47
5	Draft Commonwealth Conversation recommendations	47
6	Commonwealth: It's time to talk trade	43
7	Commonwealth Conversation emerging findings published	39
8	Getting it right about the headship of the Commonwealth	29


- The top three most popular Conversation videos, as viewed on YouTube, were:
 1. [“I see a day when Zimbabwe will rejoin the Commonwealth” says Zimbabwean Minister](#)
 2. [Sri Lanka's celebrity cricketer Muttiah Muralitharan calls for leaders to prioritise poverty](#)
 3. [UK Foreign Secretary welcomes a Conversation about the future of the Commonwealth](#)
- We received over 2,000 comments during the Conversation. These included posts and comments on the Conversation website; comments on Facebook; comments on blogs posted on other websites about the Conversation; comments under articles about the Conversation on other media websites (see section 5 for more details); and comments received by email, phone, letter.
- We ran 9, one-click polls on the website homepage, attracting 2050 voters. The most popular poll was ‘Is the Commonwealth still relevant?’ During this poll 36% of respondents said that the Commonwealth is still relevant, but 62% said it is not, and 2% said they didn’t know. (An [archive](#) of all of these polls is available to view online.)


The digital divide notwithstanding, the website was one of the most effective ways to reach out to people all around the world and to collect a wide range of views. Although the Conversation has come to an end, the website remains live as an archive and all the material and videos remain accessible online.


2.2 SOCIAL NETWORKS

It was clear from the beginning of the Conversation that reaching out to young people would be essential. This was particularly important, given that the Commonwealth’s theme for 2009 was ‘The Commonwealth at 60: serving a new generation’. We therefore had a strong presence on social media sites:

 We regularly updated the RCS’s Facebook page – www.facebook.com/thercs - with links to new material as it was posted on the Conversation website. The Facebook page itself became a place for people to leave comments and post links to other relevant pages. The page had 743 fans at the end of the Conversation, and over 3,000 clicks through to the Conversation website had come from Facebook.

 We built up a following on Twitter under a profile from the Director of the RCS, Danny Sriskandarajah: www.twitter.com/DannyRCS. We gained 277 followers, and over 1,200 clicks through to posts on the Conversation website had come from Twitter by the end of the Conversation.

 We used the RCS’s YouTube page to upload videos which we then embedded in Conversation starters on the Conversation website. All the videos uploaded for the Conversation can also be viewed directly via YouTube on www.youtube.com/TheRCSociety.

 We used the RCS’s Flickr page to upload photographs from Conversation events around the world. These were highlighted in a gallery at the bottom of the events page on the Conversation website www.thecommonwealthconversation.org/events. All the photos can also be viewed on Flickr at: www.flickr.com/photos/40178402@N04/.

2.3 ONLINE FOCUS GROUPS

We commissioned an independent expert team from the research consultancy, CM Insight, to design and conduct two bespoke online focus groups. They recruited university students under the age of 25 to take part in a virtual discussion on bulletin boards over three days from 6-8 October 2009.

The 31 students came from 9 countries across the world, covering all regions of the Commonwealth: Sri Lanka (2); India (4); Cyprus (2); Canada (6); UK (2); Ghana (5); Australia (2); New Zealand (3); Trinidad and Tobago (5). There was a balanced split of male and female participants. All students were paid a small incentive to participate.

Each student was asked to log into the discussion for at least 30 minutes a day, answer that day's questions and interact with the postings of other students. Questions were pre-set but were modified on occasion to suit the responses received. They were designed so that students had to answer them before seeing others' responses to ensure that they were not being unduly influenced. The majority of the questions and answers were in written format, but there were also whiteboards for students to annotate, a quiz for them to answer, and some sound clips for them to listen to. Each of these pieces was designed to further participants' knowledge and stimulate their thinking.

Without knowing that the discussion forum would be focused on the Commonwealth, participants logged on during the first day to discuss global issues of importance to them. The second day was spent exploring student's knowledge and impressions of the Commonwealth, partly through a quiz, and partly through student's reactions to comments on a white board. On the third day, having been given more information about the Commonwealth, participants discussed its future. This experiment revealed again how little people know about the association, but how positively they view its potential once they learn more about it.

An edited version of the full focus group report is attached at **Annex 2**.

2.4 ONLINE DEBATES

In collaboration with the British Council, we hosted a series of four virtual debates on Tuesday 3rd November 2009. These were filmed at the RCS in London and streamed live on the internet by ModComms Ltd. These debates attracted a worldwide audience who were able to ask questions of the panellists via text chat. The fact that the debates were spaced out over the course of the day in London allowed participants in all areas of the Commonwealth, in various time zones, to tune in to at least one of them. Over 550 individuals and groups took part in the debates, which are archived and available to view online.

The four debates were:

1. [Climate Change and the Environment](#). Speakers: David Viner (British Council), David Hill (UK Department for Energy and Climate Change) and representatives from the Young Commonwealth Climate Change summit
2. [Youth Voice](#). Speakers: Claire Anholt (RCS), Tom Le Feuvre (British Youth Council), Barbara Soetan (previous participant in Commonwealth youth programmes)
3. [The Commonwealth in the 21st Century](#). Speakers: Danny Sriskandarajah (RCS Director), Kamallesh Sharma (Commonwealth Secretary-General), Gerard Lemos (British Council Chair)
4. [How does communication technology enhance the work of civil society organisations](#). Speakers: David Galipeau (UN), Matt O'Neill (ModComms Ltd.)

2.5 CONVERSATION NEWS

Over the course of the Conversation, we did our very best to keep engaged those people who had contributed in various ways during the project. We did this by emailing out regular newsletters. 9 of these newsletters were sent out during the Conversation. Our extensive mailing list of several thousand subscribers included all those who had commented on the website or taken a questionnaire, a large number of those who had taken part in events around the world, all Commonwealth High Commission representatives in London, and all Commonwealth civil society organisations.

From: The Royal Commonwealth Society [conversation@thercs.org] Sent: Fri 13/11/2009 15:50
To: Zoë Ware
Cc:
Subject: Commonwealth Conversation: Latest News!



Commonwealth Conversation: Latest News!

.....
“We are busily drafting the report of the Commonwealth Conversation's earliest findings that will be publicly presented in Trinidad to the Commonwealth's leaders. This will be available for you to see within the next two weeks - we will let you know when it appears online! This is our first attempt to summarise all that you have told us over the course of the last four months. But it is not the end of the Conversation. We welcome your reactions to the report and urge you to share your thoughts with us.” [The Commonwealth Conversation Team](#)

[Join the Debate!](#)

- [Sri Lanka's celebrity cricketer, Muttiah Muralitharan, calls for leaders to prioritise poverty:](#) The leading wicket-taker in test cricket history and a dedicated humanitarian and philanthropist, 'Murali' joins the Conversation...
- [Live Online Discussions:](#) Last week, participants from around the world challenged panellists, including the Secretary-General, to answer their toughest questions live on air. Watch what happened...
- [A climate change refugee speaks out:](#) Ursula Rakova comes from the Carterets, a series of tiny islands off the coast of Papua New Guinea. Her people are the world's first climate change refugees...
- ["We don't hear the voice of the Commonwealth loud enough" says Kenyan Vice President:](#) In our exclusive interview, Kalonzo Musyoka speaks frankly about the need for Commonwealth renewal...

[Events around the world](#)

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Some 60 Conversation events have taken place in 21 different Commonwealth countries so far. Visit our [Events Page](#) on the website to read reports, see photos and watch video clips. Highlights include:

- [Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia](#)
- [Caribbean Diaspora in the UK](#)
- [Wellington, New Zealand](#)

['My Commonwealth' competition deadline extended](#)

.....
[We have already received some fascinating entries into our competition, but there is still time to take part. The deadline has been extended to 31st December](#)

3. Offline activities

We knew when we started the Conversation that physically bringing people together to talk about what the Commonwealth means to them would be vital, especially given that millions of people across the world have little or no access to the internet. We were overwhelmed by the enthusiasm that people showed in helping us to achieve this. Whether through a ‘Commonwealth Consultation’ involving high-profile speakers, a smaller, informal ‘Commonwealth Chat’, or an ‘Expert Discussion’ with professionals from a variety of fields, people in every region of the Commonwealth took part in events. The results of the discussions were captured through a variety of reports, photos, video footage and questionnaires. Summaries of the majority of events can be viewed by browsing the events calendar on the website: www.thecommonwealthconversation.org/events/ or by reading individual event reports: www.thecommonwealthconversation.org/category/conversation-events/

During the course of the Conversation, we facilitated **87 events** in **26 countries** across all regions of the Commonwealth, involving approximately **3,900 people**. The following sections give summaries of all these events. More detailed reports can be provided by the RCS upon request.

3.1 COMMONWEALTH CONSULTATIONS

We asked interested partner organisations around the world to organise ‘Commonwealth Consultations’ among their own networks. During the Conversation 33 consultations were held in 17 countries (11 in Africa, 5 in Asia, 3 in the Pacific, 7 in Europe and Canada, 7 in the Caribbean) involving over 2,700 people.

These consultations took different forms, varying from panel debates watched by over 100 participants to smaller discussions with parliamentarians; from film-making projects for school children to press conferences. The RCS provided detailed guidance on ‘How to host a Commonwealth Consultation’, as well as a series of questions designed to structure the discussions. In many cases, the local RCS branch and the British High Commission were the key partners and offered invaluable support, but a wide range of other organisations also helped to make these events a success.

No.	Location	Date	Description
1	Ottawa, Canada	17.09.2009	The RCS Ottawa branch, Commonwealth Parliamentary Association, and British High Commission in Ottawa took part in two frank discussions about the future of the Commonwealth
2	Port Louis, Mauritius	24.09.2009	32 high profile Mauritians, including two former Presidents, attended a discussion hosted and chaired by the British High Commissioner with a presentation by the Director of the RCS
3	Abuja, Nigeria	24.09.2009	4 Commonwealth High Commissioners and representatives from the Nigerian government and Commonwealth Youth Organisation of Nigeria held a press conference to launch the Conversation
4	Buea, Cameroon	26.09.2009	The RCS Cameroon branch, with support from the British High Commission, organised a panel discussion with high profile guests that attracted 44 participants from a wide range of professions

5	Arusha, Tanzania	01.10.2009	The British Council in Arusha facilitated a dialogue with local civil society representatives and visiting parliamentarians on the eve of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association conference
6	Arusha, Tanzania	02.10.2009	65 delegates from 16 countries and territories attended a lunchtime reception and discussion hosted by the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association UK Branch and facilitated by the Director of the RCS
7	Harare, Zimbabwe	09.10.2009	The British Council Zimbabwe hosted a lively discussion at the University of Zimbabwe for over 250 people from a cross section of society including students, media, academics and civil society
8	Abuja, Nigeria	12.10.2009	The Commonwealth Youth Organisation of Nigeria, supported by the British High Commission, organised a high profile discussion attended by over 70 people from a wide range of backgrounds
9	Auckland, New Zealand	16.10.2009	40 students from One Tree Hill college in Auckland produced a video about the Commonwealth's future with help from the Auckland branch of the RCS and the British High Commission
10	Toronto, Canada	20.10.2009	About 30 people from academia and government took part in a discussion at the University of Toronto led by well known speakers and facilitated by the British Consulate-General
11	Wellington, New Zealand	21.10.2009	A range of students, parliamentarians and invited guests took part in a seminar hosted by the former Prime Minister in the New Zealand Parliament. It was organised by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, the Institute of International Studies and the Commonwealth Trust, Wellington
12	Wellington, New Zealand	23.10.2009	The Luvei Viti (Children of Fiji) Community Group held a discussion about the Commonwealth with representatives from the Fijian community. It was attended by the President of the Commonwealth Trust, Wellington
13	Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia	26.10.2009	Over 60 students, diplomats, academics, and civil society figures went to a discussion organised by the British High Commission and the RCS Malaysia Branch and attended by the Director of the RCS
14	New Delhi, India	27.10.2009	140 media students and civil society figures took part in a debate hosted by the British High Commission and the Commonwealth Journalists association and attended by the Director of the RCS
15	New Delhi, India	27.10.2009	The Director of the RCS led an animated discussion with 15 students arranged by the Commonwealth Student Welfare Group of India and held in the British High Commission

16	Nairobi, Kenya	27.10.2009	Over 30 representatives from youth organisations, the media, universities, and civil society took part in a lively panel and audience discussion at the British Council
17	Dhaka, Bangladesh	29.10.2009	The Media Initiative for Public Policy organised a roundtable for 44 foreign relations analysts, academics, diplomats, journalists, civil society and youth groups, and attended by the Foreign Minister
18	Lusaka, Zambia	30.10.2009	The Director of the RCS took part in a press conference and discussion about the Commonwealth for journalists. The British High Commission also facilitated two TV programmes about the Commonwealth, interviewing the current and former President
19	London, UK	30.10.2009	60 young people taking part in the Young Commonwealth Climate Summit organised by the CYEC, Commonwealth Secretariat and CPSU took part in group discussions and an open debate
20	Pretoria, South Africa	01.11.2009	100 journalists and people from academia and government attended a discussion at the Institute for Security Studies with UK Minister Baroness Kinnock and the Director of the RCS
21	Zomba, Malawi	01.11.2009	70 students from Chancellor college took part in a lively debate after a panel discussion with 3 High Commissioners and academics, including the Vice-Chancellor of the University of Malawi
22	Male, Maldives	05.11.2009	The Ministry of Foreign Affairs organised a panel discussion and debate which was attended by 30 people from a range of professions and ages
23	London, UK	09.11.2009	At a reception for over 100 members of the Caribbean Diaspora community in the UK at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, a wide range of people shared their views on the Commonwealth
24	London, UK	09.11.2009	The Director of the RCS spoke about the Conversation at a welcome day for 300 new Commonwealth scholars who had just arrived in the UK, arranged by the Commonwealth Scholarships Commission
25	London, UK	09.11.2009	60 MPs from 38 countries took part in a lively debate about the future of the Commonwealth at the RCS during the International Parliamentary Governance Seminar organised by the CPA UK Branch
26	Regina, Canada	18.11.2009	Members of the RCS Saskatchewan branch hosted a discussion about the Commonwealth with the Speaker and Clerk of the Legislative Assembly at the Royal United Services Institute

27	Port of Spain, Trinidad and Tobago	21.11.2009	A discussion about the emerging findings of the Conversation took place at a pre-CHOGM seminar organised by the Institute of International Relations, University of the West Indies
28	Port of Spain, Trinidad and Tobago	24.11.2009	The RCS launched ' <i>Common What?</i> ' at a reception during the 2009 Commonwealth People's Forum, facilitated by the Commonwealth Foundation
29	Port of Spain, Trinidad and Tobago	25.11.2009	' <i>Common What?</i> ' was launched to the press at a briefing and question and answer session with the RCS Chairman and Director in the CHOGM media centre
30	Port of Spain, Trinidad and Tobago	26.11.2009	' <i>Common What?</i> ' was presented to 500 young people taking part in the Commonwealth Youth Forum, who provided encouraging feedback
31	Port of Spain, Trinidad and Tobago	26.11.2009	With the support of the Commonwealth Business Council, the Chairman of the RCS hosted a breakfast discussion with delegates at the Commonwealth Business Forum about ' <i>Common What?</i> '
32	Port of Spain, Trinidad and Tobago	27.11.2009	The RCS took part in a discussion about the Commonwealth's future with academics and Round Table members as part of the journal's centenary celebrations at the University of the West Indies
33	Port of Spain, Trinidad and Tobago	29.11.2009	The emerging findings of the Conversation were discussed at an event on LGBTI rights in the Commonwealth organised by the advocacy group 'Global Rights' at the University of the West Indies

3.2 COMMONWEALTH CHATS

In addition to the more formal consultations, we asked anyone with an interest in the future of the Commonwealth to convene a 'Commonwealth Chat' with their friends, colleagues, or representatives from their local community. During the Conversation 43 chats were held in 10 countries (13 in Africa, 22 in Asia, 2 in the Pacific, and 6 in Europe and Canada) involving almost 1,000 people.

These chats were predominantly organised by individuals with a particular passion for the Commonwealth and interest in the Conversation. In India and Uganda a large number of them were arranged by the RCS branches, for which we are very grateful. The RCS provided detailed guidance on 'How to conduct a Commonwealth Chat', giving tips for facilitators and consent forms if the chat was to be filmed or recorded. In addition, we produced a discussion guide with some possible questions and a short quiz. This guide also contained basic information about the Commonwealth to inform both the facilitators and the participants about the association as the discussion progressed.

All organisers were asked to submit a report of their chats, with the incentive that a prize would be awarded for the best report. We were very impressed with all of the reports, but particularly pleased to award first prize and £200 in vouchers to Kareem Folajaiye, a student from Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, Nigeria. Kareem's report is attached in **Annex 3**. The second prize went to Dr. Cornelia Ndifon, from the International Training and Education Centre for Health, Otjozondjupa Region, Namibia, and the third prize to Wajahat Nassar, a student from the University of Engineering and Technology, Lahore, Pakistan.

No.	Location	Date	Who took part in the Chat?
1	Dar es Salaam, Tanzania	August 2009	9 pupils from the Shaaban Robert Secondary School
2	Lahore, Pakistan	August 2009	7 students from the University of Engineering and Technology
3	Brisbane, Australia	August/Sept 2009	13 members of the RCS Queensland Branch
4	Otjiwarongo Town, Namibia	September 2009	9 students from 3 schools across the town
5	Otjiwarongo Town, Namibia	27 October 2009	12 regional education officers from the Otjozondjupa Regional Education Authority
6	London, UK	19 October 2009	11 staff from 6 countries working at the Commonwealth Foundation
7	Cambridge, UK	23 October 2009	16 members of the RCS Cambridge Branch, predominantly students, meeting in Wolfson College
8	Cape Town, South Africa	26 October 2009	12 students from the University of Cape Town, in discussion with the Commonwealth Secretary-General
9	Osun State, Nigeria	29 October 2009	12 students from Obafemi Awolowo University
10	Toronto, Canada	October 2009	Members of the RCS Toronto branch
11	New Delhi, India	October 2009	Approximately 20 students from Hindu College, facilitated by the Commonwealth Student Welfare Group, India
12	New Delhi, India	October 2009	Approximately 20 students from Satyawati College, facilitated by the Commonwealth Student Welfare Group, India
13	New Delhi, India	October 2009	Approximately 20 students from SSN College, facilitated by the Commonwealth Student Welfare Group, India
14	Jaipur, India	October 2009	Approximately 20 students from Bright Future School, facilitated by the Commonwealth Student Welfare Group, India
15	New Delhi, India	October 2009	Approximately 20 students from Shivaji College, facilitated by the Commonwealth Student Welfare Group, India

16	New Delhi, India	October 2009	Approximately 20 students from Kirodi Mal College, facilitated by the Commonwealth Student Welfare Group, India
17	Jaipur, India	October 2009	Approximately 20 students from St. Xavier's School, facilitated by the Commonwealth Student Welfare Group, India
18	Jaipur, India	October 2009	Approximately 20 students from Subodh College, facilitated by the Commonwealth Student Welfare Group, India
19	Chirawa, India	October 2009	Approximately 20 students from Jeevani International School, facilitated by the Commonwealth Student Welfare Group, India
20	Pacheri, India	October 2009	Approximately 20 students from Singhania University, facilitated by the Commonwealth Student Welfare Group, India
21	Khetri, India	October 2009	Approximately 20 students from Sophia School, facilitated by the Commonwealth Student Welfare Group, India
22	Jaipur, India	October 2009	Approximately 20 students from Indo – Bharat School, facilitated by the Commonwealth Student Welfare Group, India
23	New Delhi, India	October 2009	Approximately 20 students from St. Xavier's School, facilitated by the Commonwealth Student Welfare Group, India
24	Jaipur, India	October 2009	Approximately 20 students from Tagore Public School, facilitated by the Commonwealth Student Welfare Group, India
25	Jaipur, India	October 2009	Approximately 20 students from Rajasthan Law College, facilitated by the Commonwealth Student Welfare Group, India
26	New Delhi, India	October 2009	Approximately 20 students from St. Stephen's College, facilitated by the Commonwealth Student Welfare Group, India
27	New Delhi, India	October 2009	Approximately 20 students from Hansraj College, facilitated by the Commonwealth Student Welfare Group, India
28	Chandigarh, India	October 2009	Approximately 20 students from Punjab Engr. College., facilitated by the Commonwealth Student Welfare Group, India
29	Bawana, India	October 2009	Approximately 20 students from Delhi College of Engr., facilitated by the Commonwealth Student Welfare Group, India

30	Rohtak, India	October 2009	Approximately 20 students from M.D. University, facilitated by the Commonwealth Student Welfare Group, India
31	Makro, India	October 2009	Approximately 20 students from M. S. International School, facilitated by the Commonwealth Student Welfare Group, India
32	Canberra, Australia	Sept/ October 2009	Members of the RCS Canberra Branch
33	Bath, UK	October 2009	10 Members of the RCS Bath Branch and friends
34	Wakiso, Uganda	November 2009	36 students from Nkumba University, facilitated by the Commonwealth People's Association of Uganda
35	Mukono, Uganda	November 2009	35 students from Uganda Christian University, facilitated by the Commonwealth People's Association of Uganda
36	Iganga, Uganda	November 2009	41 students from Busoga University, facilitated by the Commonwealth People's Association of Uganda
37	Luweero, Uganda	November 2009	43 students from Bugema University, facilitated by the Commonwealth People's Association of Uganda
38	Fort Portal, Uganda	November 2009	25 students from Uganda Pentecostal University, facilitated by the Commonwealth People's Association of Uganda
39	Kampala, Uganda	November 2009	19 students from Islamic University In Uganda, facilitated by the Commonwealth People's Association of Uganda
40	Masaka, Uganda	November 2009	40 students from Uganda Martyrs University-Nkozi, facilitated by the Commonwealth People's Association of Uganda
41	Mbarara, Uganda	November 2009	40 students from Mbarara University of Science and Technology, facilitated by the Commonwealth People's Association of Uganda
42	London, UK	November 2009	30 pupils from Westminster School
43	Across UK	November 2009	Representatives from the British Youth Council across the UK

3.3 EXPERT DISCUSSIONS

At the same time as our partners around the world were organising consultations and chats, we convened expert groups of key stakeholders from within and beyond the Commonwealth family. For logistical and cost reasons, all of these discussions took place in the UK, but they involved as broad a range of nationalities as possible. The 11 expert groups, involving over 200 people, produced some of the most insightful and revealing discussions of the Conversation. All events were held under the Chatham House Rule, but short summaries are provided below.

The 'Outsiders'

We asked people who were expert in four of the Commonwealth's key priority areas, but most of whom had little knowledge of its work, how they thought the association could most usefully add value in their field.

No.	Date	Theme	People	Summary
1	13.10.2009	Climate Change	17	Topics of discussion included the need to share environmental best practices between Commonwealth member-states, the importance of the Commonwealth raising awareness of the environmental plight of its small island states, and the necessity for Commonwealth countries to focus on creating low-carbon economies that maintain human development.
2	14.10.2009	Business	10	Attendees agreed that while Commonwealth member states possess many advantages that provide a good starting point for trade between each other, such as linguistic ties and similar legal structures, the challenge is to channel these strengths to create a context where trade can flourish. The discussion was organised in partnership with the Commonwealth Business Council.
3	22.10.2009	Democracy	14	Participants suggested that, while democracy is one of the Commonwealth's core values, the quality of democracies in member states varies greatly; the association must lay out clearer definitions of what it means to be a democracy. Attendees debated the need for CMAG reform and suggested the whole Commonwealth family must become more transparent and democratic in its internal processes. It was agreed that the Commonwealth should stress the link between education and good governance.
4	23.10.2009	Development	10	The discussion largely focused on the fact that, while the Commonwealth is known to do good work in the development field, its profile is woefully low and it is widely over-looked by major development actors. It was suggested that the Commonwealth needs to develop its own unique development message and method of working. The Commonwealth could be a vehicle for 'radical' ideas rather than an association that follows the orthodoxy of the World Bank or International Monetary Fund.

The 'Insiders'

As well as probing the outsiders, we also spent a long time in informed discussions about the future of the association with those who know it best: the insiders who work and volunteer for the Commonwealth family.

No.	Date	Group	People	Summary
1	29.09.2009	Young people working for or connected with Commonwealth organisations	30	Some participants suggested that the Commonwealth's lack of public profile is applicable to all international organisations, and therefore not a cause for concern. Others lamented the lack of awareness about the good work that the Commonwealth's small budget permits. It was suggested that the consensus basis of the Commonwealth means that the Secretariat cannot speak out on important subjects. Participants commented that the Commonwealth should pay more attention to climate change and South-South cooperation. It was agreed that individuals who had personal experience of Commonwealth institutions and activities almost always feel great affection for it.
2	16.10.2009	Commonwealth Civil Society	30	Participants suggested the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Commonwealth should focus on a few key issues (perhaps even one) in an innovative way. These should be political, rather than programmatic, because the Secretariat does not have sufficient funding. • The Commonwealth must focus on CMAG reform and human rights abuses in Commonwealth countries. • Civil society has an important role to play in lobbying Commonwealth member governments, but Commonwealth civil society organisations must achieve a more unified vision to present to leaders and officials.
3	03.11.2009	Representatives from High Commissions	30	Participants said that the Commonwealth needs to raise its public profile significantly. The role of member states was emphasised and it was suggested that they must infuse energy into the association and create a joint definition of what values the Commonwealth represents. Participants agreed that the association must become more contemporary and youth-focused. The Commonwealth was praised for its unique features, such as CMAG and its consensus voting structure.
4	04.11.2009	Commonwealth Secretariat Directors	6	Participants suggested that: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Although the Commonwealth Secretariat likes working 'under the radar', it does need to increase its public profile. • The Secretariat needs to measure its

				<p>achievements more demonstrably.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • While serving 54 political masters often means refraining from discussing important democracy and human rights issues, there is scope for member governments to demonstrate the political will to deal with these issues openly. • Member governments should increase the Secretariat's funding substantially.
5	04.02.2010	Commonwealth Civil Society	32	<p>After discussion of the draft final recommendations, participants suggested that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • While the Secretary-General needs to be a stronger leader, if s/he speaks out too much this will lessen the impact of the Secretariat's quiet diplomacy. • The Commonwealth needs prominent public champions. • Some of the 'big ideas' that the Commonwealth could make its own in the 21st century could be education, reform of international institutions, cross cultural links or building bridges with the Islamic world.
6	05.02.2010	Representatives from High Commissions	22	<p>After discussion of the draft final recommendations participants suggested that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The communications strategy of the Commonwealth Secretariat needs to be improved. It should be adapted to suit local media trends in different countries. The message about the Commonwealth's worth should be tailored to the region and the target audience. • The Secretariat needs to be better at promoting its unique selling point, proving what it can achieve, but also saying what it can't do. • Some Commonwealth associations are more focused on self-preservation than working for the people.
7	17.02.2010	Commonwealth Secretariat Directors	9	<p>In a wide ranging discussion participants suggested that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • While the Commonwealth may have had a higher profile in the 1980s, the Secretariat is more effective now. • Balancing the desire to further shared values while remaining a trusted partner is very delicate. It generally means being low-key on political affairs. • The Commonwealth's two pillars of democracy and development are mutually dependent: if it didn't provide demand-led development assistance, the Secretariat would not be able to advocate and push for good governance. • Commonwealth leaders must use their association better, and talk about it politically.

4. Competition

Over half of the Commonwealth's 2 billion people are aged 25 or under, and we knew when we started the Conversation that hearing their thoughts about the future of the association would be crucial. We therefore ran the 'My Commonwealth' competition for young people. The simple task was as follows:

MY COMMONWEALTH COMPETITION

The year is 2049. It's the Commonwealth's 100th birthday! Imagine that you are the Commonwealth Secretary-General. What would your Commonwealth look like and do? Write and/or draw a response on one side of a piece of paper.

We promoted the competition as widely as possible around the world, and many RCS branches and other Conversation partners helped to spread the word. In addition, all 2,500 schools who take part in the RCS's annual Commonwealth Essay Competition in 2009 were sent the competition flyer, which can be seen on our [website](#).

When the competition closed on 31 December 2009 we had received 362 excellent entries from young people in 24 countries around the world. After much deliberation, we shortlisted the best 10 of these entries, and were delighted that a distinguished panel of four judges agreed to choose the top prize winners. The judges were the current Secretary-General, H.E. Kamalesh Sharma, and three former Secretaries-General: Sir Don McKinnon, Chief Emeka Anyaoku and Sir Sonny Ramphal.

We were very pleased to award the top **three prizes** of £200, £100 and £50 to the following outstanding entries:

1. Quek Yihui, aged 16, from Singapore
2. Asabi Rawlins, aged 16, from Trinidad and Tobago
3. Boodhoo Vijna Hiteshna, aged 17, from Mauritius

The following two entries were also **Highly Commended**:

- Brendan Wright, aged 19, from Australia
- Baila Shakaib, aged 16, from Pakistan

All of these entries are included in **Annex 4** and are available to view online, with other shortlisted entries at www.thecommonwealthconversation.org/my-commonwealth-competition/.

5. Media

In order to reach beyond those who directly took part in surveys, online activities, offline activities and competitions, and to generate wider interest and debate about the Commonwealth, we put considerable effort into generating global media coverage during the Conversation. This included extensive coverage of the poll findings, reports of events around the world, and general commentary on the future of the Commonwealth. During the Conversation, we were made aware of 138 individual media 'hits' (and a further 94 reprints) relating to the Conversation in 35 countries.

A key element of our media strategy was to write bespoke opinion pieces for leading national newspapers and to secure radio and television interviews. During the Conversation there were 24 pieces that were directly authored by the RCS or that included an interview with a member of the Conversation team. Three of these opinion pieces are printed in **Annex 5**: from July 2009 in The Age, Australia; October 2009 in The Post, Zambia; and November 2009 in The Guardian, Trinidad and Tobago.

Estimating the reach of this media coverage (and that which our monitoring did not pick up) is near impossible. However, the print and online media where Conversation-related pieces appeared have a combined readership of well over 40 million people worldwide. In addition, a BBC World Debate, facilitated by the Conversation team and screened on 28 and 29 November 2009, had an audience of approximately 100 million people through the BBC World TV channel and BBC World Service. While these millions of people did not all directly participate in the Conversation, we hope that by reading an article or listening to a debate about the Commonwealth, they learnt more about the association and were encouraged to think about its future.

The table below is a summary of all of the press coverage relating to the Conversation (and a few relevant pieces that immediately pre-date it) that we have recorded. We have included links to articles where possible (click on the hyperlink on the date for the relevant article). Opinion pieces/interviews are highlighted in red. This information can also be found on the Conversation website's Press Highlights section: www.thecommonwealthconversation.org/press-highlights/

No	Media	Date	Summary and Reprint Details
AFRICA 42 unique articles (at least 49 with reprints)			
CAMEROON			
1	CRTV Buea	25.09.2009 27.09.2009	Regional Branch of the Cameroon Radio and Television Cooperation. Broadcast on most popular 2pm news slot
2	Mt Cameroon FM	26.09.2009	South West Regional FM Radio. Highlights from Conversation event.
3	STV	26.09.2009	Conversation event covered in evening news
4	Ocean City Radio	26.09.2009	Conversation event covered in news
5	Eden newspaper	28.09.2009	Article about Conversation event
6	Cameroon Tribune	28.09.2009	Article about Conversation event
7	Le Messenger	28.09.2009	Article about Conversation event in French language paper
8	Le Jour	28.09.2009	Article about Conversation event in French language paper
9	The Star	28.09.2009	Details of Conversation event
10	The Post	05.10.2009	News of Conversation event
GAMBIA			
11	WOW.gm	23.07.2009	Gambia News online
12	Freedom Newspaper	27.09.2009	By Kemo Cham (Reprinted in Justice for the Press, Gambia; AfricaNews)

KENYA			
13	Business Daily	21.08.2009	Op-ed by Danny Sriskandarajah (Reprinted: All Africa.com; Property Kenya)
MALAWI			
14	The Daily Times	04.11.2009	By Tiwonge Kacheche. Report of Conversation event
15	The Nation	05.11.2009	By Emmanuel Muwamba. Report of Conversation event
MAURITIUS			
16	L'Express	25.09.2009	Interview with Danny Sriskandarajah by Nicholas Rainer
17	Le Mauricien	20.09.2009	Op-ed by Danny Sriskandarajah
MOZAMBIQUE			
18	Savana	04.09.2009	Interview with British High Commissioner in Mozambique
NIGERIA			
19	Business Day	30.09.2009	Article by Kaye Whiteman
20	Next	25.09.2009	Article by Bassey Udo
21	Daily Triumph	25.09.2009	Article
22	Guardian Newspapers	04.11.2009	Op-ed by Baroness Kinnock, UK Minister for the Commonwealth
SIERRA LEONE			
23	Sierra Express Media	21.09.2009	Article by Musa Sangarie
24	Cocorioko	05.11.2009	Derek Ingram, 'Should Rwanda be let in?'
SOUTH AFRICA			
25	Business Day	22.09.2009	Johannesburg paper. (Reprinted in All Africa.com)
26	Pretoria News	09.2009	Article about Conversation
TANZANIA			
27	Daily News, Arusha	13.08.2009	Op-ed about Conversation by Diane Corner, British High Commissioner
28	The Citizen	30.09.2009	Report of event by Beatus Kagashe. (Reprinted in All Africa.com)
UGANDA			
29	The Monitor	23.07.2009	Article by Tabu Butagira. (Reprinted in All Africa.com)
30	New Vision	29.09.2009	Op-ed by Danny Sriskandarajah
31	New Vision	25.11.2009	Article by Jeff Lule on Conversation in Uganda
32	The Observer	25.11.2009	Article by Devapriyo Das
ZAMBIA			
33	The Post	04.08.2009	RCS press release about Kaunda interview by Bivan Saluseki
34	The Post	31.10.2009	Op-ed by Danny Sriskandarajah
35	Zambian TV	30.10.2009	Interview with President Banda, former President Kaunda, and Danny Sriskandarajah for two, hour long TV programmes, broadcast in December 2010.
ZIMBABWE			
36	The Zimbabwean	02.08.2009	Article by Trevor Grundy
37	The Zimbabwean	13.08.2009	Article about RCS Kaunda and Fraser interview by Trevor Grundy

38	Zim Net Radio	12.08.2009	Discussion about Kaunda interview by King Shango
39	The Zim Daily	12.08.2009	Feature about Kaunda interview
40	The Herald	12.08.2009	Feature about Kaunda interview
41	Mukoma.com	25.09.2009	Article
42	SW Radio Africa	05.11.2009	Piece about Derek Ingram's Rwanda article
ASIA 14 unique articles (at least 20 with reprints)			
INDIA			
43	The Hindu	24.07.2009	Op-ed by Hasan Suroor
44	Asian News International	20.07.2009	Article. (Reprinted on Yahoo News India; Newstrack India; Breaking News 24/7)
45	Press Information Bureau	28.10.2009	Government of India
46	Financial Express	09.11.2009	Op-ed by Danny Sriskandarajah (Reprinted in Yahoo News India)
PAKISTAN			
47	Associated Press of Pakistan	23.07.2009	Article by London correspondent
48	Pakistan News Blog	26.11.2009	Article
MALAYSIA			
49	Malaysia Star	28.10.2009	Article following event by Yuen Meikeng
50	New Straits Times	28.10.2009	Op-ed by Danny Sriskandarajah
51	New Straits Times	01.12.2009	Editorial. (Reprinted in Silobreaker)
SRI LANKA			
52	Sri Lanka Internet Newspaper	03.11.2009	Article following Interview with Murali Muralitharan on the Conversation website
53	Island Cricket	03.11.2009	Article following Interview with Murali Muralitharan on the Conversation website
54	Daily Mirror	28.11.2009	Article. (Reprinted on www.spot.lk)
55	Daily Mirror	30.11.2009	Article.
MALDIVES			
56	Minivan News	01.12.2009	Article by Ahmed Naish.
PACIFIC 38 unique articles (at least 78 with reprints)			
AUSTRALIA			
57	Sydney Morning Herald	01.05.2009	Op-ed by Danny Sriskandarajah
58	Sydney Morning Herald	20.07.2009	Article about poll results. (Reprinted in: Courier-Mail.com; South Asian Media Net)
59	Sydney Morning Herald	20.07.2009	Op-ed by Paola Totaro about poll results. (Reprinted in: WA Today; The Age)
60	ABC News PM	20.07.2009	Mark Colvin Show. Interview with Danny Sriskandarajah by Bronwin Herbert about poll results
61	Brisbane Times	20.07.2009	Op-ed by Belinda Tasker about poll results.
62	ABC Radio Australia	21.07.2009	Michael Cavanagh interview with Danny Sriskandarajah
63	The Canberra Times	21.07.2009	Op-ed by Belinda Tasker

64	Australians for Constitutional Monarchy	21.07.2009	Article by Professor David Flint
65	The Age	24.07.2009	Op-ed by Danny Sriskandarajah
66	Online Opinion	19.10.2009	Op-ed by Danny Sriskandarajah
67	The Age	24.11.2009	Op-ed by Paola Totaro (Reprinted in Sydney Morning Herald)
68	ABC Radio Australia	26.11.2009	(Geraldine Coutts interview with Danny Sriskandarajah) (Reprinted on Australia Network News)
69	ABC Radio Australia	27.11.2009	Sen Lam interview with Danny Sriskandarajah
70	ABC News The World Today	27.11.2009	Bronwyn Herbert interview with Danny Sriskandarajah
71	Courier Mail	28.11.2009	Article by Peter Mitchell
72	Big Pond News	28.11.2009	Article
73	Jim Belshaw Blog	29.11.2009	Blog by Jim Belshaw
74	Australian Associated Press	29.11.2009	Article by Peter Mitchell. (Reprinted by Sydney Morning Herald; Today Lanka; Netindia123; Perth Now; Sify News, India; TVNZ, New Zealand; Daily News and Analysis, India; Australian News; Big News Portugal; Barcelona News; Argentina Star; Newstrack India; Daily India; Top News, India; Thaindian; Sindh Today; Business Spectator, Australia; WA Today; Daily Telegraph, Australia; Big Pond News, Australia; The Age; Brisbane Times; The Australian; Herald Sun, Australia; Ninemsn, Australia; Adelaide Now; Courier Mail, Australia; News.com.au, Australia; numerous other reprints)
75	Sydney Morning Herald	30.11.2009	Article by Anne Davies. (Reprinted in Brisbane Times)
76	Sydney Morning Herald	30.11.2009	Blog by Anne Davies (Reprinted in WA Today; Brisbane Times)
77	Big Pond News	30.11.2009	Article
78	The Australian	30.11.2009	Article by Brad Norington
79	WA Today	30.11.2009	Article
NEW ZEALAND			
80	Kea	06.09.2009	Article
81	Scoop	14.10.2009	Press release from Auckland Conversation event
82	Voxy.co.nz	14.10.2009	Press release from Auckland Conversation event
83	Dominion Post	26.11.2009	Article by Martin Kay. (Reprinted on www.stuff.co.nz)
84	New Zealand Republic	27.11.2009	Article by L.J Holden
85	Dominion Post	28.11.2009	Article by Martin Kay. (Reprinted on www.stuff.co.nz)
86	New Zealand Herald	29.11.2009	Article by Audrey Young
PACIFIC ISLANDS			
87	Pacific Islands News Association	20.07.2009	Article. 09 (Reprinted in Mariana's Variety, Micronesia)
FIJI			
88	Islands Business	02.09.2009	Article
89	Pacific Scoop	02.09.2009	Article
90	FBC News	02.09.2009	Article
91	Fiji Daily Post	03.09.2009	Article
92	Fiji Times Online	04.09.2009	Article

93	Luvei Viti: Children of Fiji	27.11.2009	Anonymous blog
MONSERRAT			
94	Montserrat 411 News	03.09.2009	Article by Karen Allen
CARIBBEAN 17 unique articles (at least 19 with reprints)			
CAYMAN ISLANDS			
95	Cayman News Service	04.08.2009	Article
96	Cayman Net News	06.08.2009	Interview with RCS Honorary Representative
97	Caymanian Compass	19.10.2009	Article
JAMAICA			
98	Jamaica Gleaner	05.08.2009	Article about poll results
99	Jamaica Gleaner	13.08.2009	Glenda Anderson interviews Baroness Amos
TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO			
100	T&T Guardian	02.05.2009	Op-ed by Danny Sriskandarajah
101	T&T Guardian	25.11.2009	Op-ed by Danny Sriskandarajah
102	TV6	25.11.2009	Coverage of Commonwealth Conversation press conference on major national TV channel (Also covered by two others)
103	T&T Guardian	26.11.2009	Article by Gail Alexander
104	T&T Guardian	27.11.2009	Editorial by Prior Beharry
105	T&T Express	27.11.2009	Editorial
106	Power 102 FM	27.11.2009	Article
107	T&T Express	28.11.2009	Article by Keino Swambar
108	Newsday	29.11.2009	Article by Andre Bagoo
109	Newsday	30.11.2009	Article by Rhondor Dowlat
PAN-CARIBBEAN			
110	BBC Caribbean	21.07.2009	Poll results in online article
111	Caribbean Net News	05.11.2009	Piece about Derek Ingram's conversation starter on Rwanda
EUROPE AND CANADA 26 unique articles (at least 44 with reprints)			
CANADA			
112	The Globe and Mail	21.07.2009	Article by Elizabeth Renzetti
113	The Leader Post	21.07.2009	Article by Lewis Draper
114	The Globe and Mail	23.07.2009	Op-ed by Danny Sriskandarajah
115	The Globe and Mail	16.10.2009	Article by Doug Saunders
116	The Toronto Star	26.11.2009	Article by Joanna Smith
117	Ottawa Citizen	26.11.2009	Article by Chris Cobb (Reprinted on www.canada.com)
118	CBC News	27.11.2009	Article
119	Counterweights	30.11.2009	Article by Randall White

120	The Toronto Star	01.12.2009	Editorial by Martin Regg Cohn
MALTA			
121	Times of Malta	21.09.2009	Op-ed by Danny Sriskandarajah
UK			
122	BBC online	09.03.2009	Article about release of UK poll results
123	The Guardian	09.03.2009	Op-ed by Danny Sriskandarajah
124	Irish Sun	20.07.2009	Article
125	University World News	02.08.2009	Article by David Jobbins
126	The Observer	02.08.2009	Article by Anushka Asthana
127	Daily Mail	03.08.2009	Article by Peter McKay
128	Reuters, The Great Debate	17.08.2009	Op-ed by Danny Sriskandarajah
129	Ben TV	07.09.2009	Danny Sriskandarajah television interview on morning show
130	ePolitix.com	17.11.2009	Article about Commonwealth Parliamentary Association UK Conversation event (Reprinted: Yahoo News UK & Ireland)
131	The Independent	25.11.2009	Article by Nigel Morris (Reprinted in New Zimbabwe)
132	The Guardian	26.11.2009	Article by Nicholas Watt/Julian Borger (Reprinted: UK News Room; UTV)
133	The Telegraph	26.11.2009	Article by Robert Colville
134	Economist	26.11.2009	Article
135	Associated Press	27.11.2009	Article by Ben Fox. (Reprinted in Forbes; the Washington Examiner; South Carolina Slate; KOLD News 13; Post Bulletin, Minnesota; the Oklahoman; Columbia News Ledger; Business Week; Boston Globe; San Francisco Examiner; Caribbean Life; numerous other US reprints)
136	Daily Express	29.11.2009	Article (Reprinted in Rozier's Orleans Diary)
137	ePolitix.com	02.12.2009	Op-ed by Baroness Scott
NON-COMMONWEALTH COUNTRIES (at least 15 reprints)			
Reprints of above articles included coverage in the following countries: United Arab Emirates, France, Portugal, Spain, Argentina, USA			
GLOBAL 1 unique article (8 with multiple showings)			
138	BBC World Debate	26.11.2009	Filmed in Trinidad and Tobago on the future of the Commonwealth. It was broadcast on BBC World on Saturday 28th November (07:10, 15:10 and 20:10 GMT) and Sunday 29th November (01:10, 07:10, 15:10 and 20:10 GMT) and also broadcast as an audio recording on BBC World Service Radio

We hope that the pages above, the annexes, and the further information on the Conversation website give a comprehensive picture of what we did to capture views of the Commonwealth from people all around the world. If you would like any more details, or think we have missed something, please contact conversation@thercs.org.



3. RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Live out principles

Our research shows that the majority of people are uncertain what truly distinguishes the Commonwealth today. The association may well have deep historical roots, many shared bonds and an unparalleled diversity; but throughout the Conversation people have asked whether membership of this particular club means anything more substantial. The obvious answer, pointed out most often by expert participants, is that this is a voluntary association based on key principles; that in a crowded international marketplace, the Commonwealth stands out as an organisation based on values. This, we were told, is what sets the Commonwealth apart and will continue to define it in the 21st century.

Yet, if the Commonwealth is about values and principles, much more needs to be done to correct the perception that the association fails to “walk the talk”. Undemocratic regimes, human rights abuses and inequality are all too prevalent in the Commonwealth today. This perceived disconnect between word and action creates cynicism and disillusionment. It also allows misperceptions about what membership of the Commonwealth stands for today to breed unchecked.

During the Conversation, people have often pointed back to the Commonwealth’s brave and pioneering stance against apartheid in South Africa and asked where this courage, in the face of injustice, can be seen today. The fact that, at the peak of the Commonwealth’s campaigning on this issue, South Africa was no longer even a member of the association, its government having withdrawn to avoid further censure, only heightens the sense of contrast. Today, while member state governments carry out appalling human rights abuses, many see a Commonwealth apparently standing blithely by.

If the Commonwealth is to function as a strong and dynamic association, then all member states must uphold the commitments they have made to democracy, good governance, human rights, freedom of expression, rule of law and sustainable environmental, social and economic development. If they fail to do so, and reject support offered by the intergovernmental Commonwealth, they must also be prepared to accept criticism.

In the same vein, the Commonwealth Secretariat, through the Secretary-General, has a responsibility to speak out when the principles enshrined in the Harare Declaration are transgressed and to act if the violation persists (something addressed in more detail in **Recommendation 2**). Similarly, Commonwealth civil society bodies have a duty to make their voices heard when they see violations of Commonwealth commitments.

Without this willingness and commitment to see principles upheld, Commonwealth membership is devalued and the association’s identity and purpose diluted. This is not about attempting to enforce black and white absolutes in a world of grey areas. It will require a nuanced approach and a thorough contextual understanding. But it is about acknowledging that a values and principles-based association that does not consistently strive to defend its ideals, and to be defined by them, risks appearing to be little more than an imperial relic.

As examples of when the Commonwealth has failed to “walk the talk” in the past year alone, in ‘*Common What?*’ we cited its silence in the face of comments made by the President of the Gambia (following a catalogue of human rights abuses in his country, the President had declared that he would “kill” anyone who “collaborates with human rights defenders”) and its unwillingness to engage in any meaningful way in the immediate aftermath of the civil war in Sri Lanka. Both were crucial moments for the Commonwealth to live out principles and define its contemporary role in the eyes of the world. Both were missed. But this failure was compounded, and one of our central findings

illustrated in the most striking way, at the pre-CHOGM press conference which took place in Trinidad and Tobago with the Commonwealth Secretary-General and Chairperson-in-office.

Facing the world's media for the first time in his newly assumed role, Prime Minister Manning was asked how the CHOGM would address exactly these sorts of issues. The journalist cited the remarks of the Gambian President and, for good measure, threw in a bill then being debated in the Ugandan parliament that proposed life imprisonment for anyone convicted of the "offence of homosexuality". Without a moment's hesitation, Prime Minister Manning dismissed both as "essentially related to domestic matters" and forming "no part of the CHOGM agenda". "It need not detain us", he said. This reaction was a huge disappointment to many in the Commonwealth family; they told us that if the Commonwealth no longer considers these issues to be its business, then it has lost its way. At the very least, it has lost its nerve.

"Commonwealth membership should be a badge of honour for countries. It should say something about their human rights record, their strong democracy, their good governance...But at the moment it says nothing. It means nothing", one employee of the intergovernmental Commonwealth told us. It is no bad thing in itself if countries want to join the Commonwealth for business reasons, regional alliances and networking opportunities, just as many people argued Rwanda did in November 2009. But if, as the 1971 Singapore Declaration makes clear, democracy really is the Commonwealth's *raison d'être*, then something needs to be done to correct the perception that the association's foundations are slipping.

Does the fact that the Commonwealth now has 54 members, as opposed to 49 twenty years ago, or 30 twenty years before that, indicate a thriving, healthy association? As one senior employee of the intergovernmental Commonwealth put it: "We are so terrified of countries walking away. But would a Commonwealth of 35 member states who all actually adhere to our principles be so much worse than what we have now?"

In September 2009, Fiji was fully suspended from the Commonwealth following the military overthrow of its government and its subsequent failure to commit to holding democratic elections. Shortly before we drew the Conversation to a close, a news story appeared in the international press in which Fiji's military leader, Frank Bainimarama, was quoted as saying that he would withdraw his country from the Commonwealth if the association did not stop "hassling him". We argue that a little more of this 'hassling', as well as the all-important 'helping', is what the Commonwealth needs to do more of. It sends a strong message about the association's unswerving commitment to democracy in the face of retaliation. It speaks volumes about what the association stands for in today's world. The Commonwealth must not be afraid to attract this sort of criticism.

Being seen as a true champion of the principles it purports to uphold will almost certainly be the most effective way of engaging a new generation of people who do not recall the association's successes against white rule in Rhodesia or apartheid in South Africa. Young people are more connected to the world around them than ever before. They are citizens of a global village and they know it. Seeing the Commonwealth exerting its influence in real ways will have a more powerful impact than any lesson from a textbook ever could.

When we made this point in our emerging findings, it was predominantly well received (and universally so from the public). But we did encounter some worrying scepticism from within the Commonwealth family. This attitude is neatly summed up by one comment we received: "The fact that some governments do not comply with Commonwealth values cannot be blamed on the Commonwealth as a whole". This fundamentally misses the point. The Commonwealth exists as an international association that seeks to encourage certain values and principles. If the intergovernmental Commonwealth abdicates this responsibility because it is not to blame for its members' failings, then it should drop the pretence that it continues to serve its stated purpose.

This recommendation does not advocate the blanket imposition of Western values upon the rest of the world. All members of the Commonwealth sign up and make a commitment to these values when they enter the association. If they are not fully owned by the whole range of Commonwealth

members, then the implication, again, is that the pretence of shared values should be dropped. Alternatively, if the excuse is that these values are open to differing interpretations by diverse countries, then we need stronger leadership to clarify the consensus position. (This is addressed in more detail in [Recommendation 2](#).)

The role of the Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group (CMAG), created by heads of government in 1995, is a unique strength of the association and critical to proving sceptics wrong. The Commonwealth is the only international organisation to have created such machinery of self-discipline and it stands as evidence of the political will that does exist to see the association's principles upheld.

CMAG's remit is clear: to deal with serious or persistent violations of the Harare Declaration which sets out the Commonwealth's fundamental political values. Since its creation, it has suspended Nigeria (1995-1999), Fiji (2000-2001/2006), Pakistan (1999-2004/2007), Zimbabwe (2002) and, most recently Fiji again (2009). Its already broad mandate was expanded in 2002 to include human rights abuses and breaches of the Commonwealth's fundamental values in non-militarised countries.

Although the Conversation found that CMAG is universally admired in principle, it is also widely criticised for interpreting its broad mandate too narrowly and often failing to take decisive action. The Executive Director of the Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative, Maja Daruwala, has said, "It is worrying to note that CMAG has by and by interpreted its mandate very narrowly to focus only on the unconstitutional overthrow of governments albeit selectively." Tellingly, long-standing observers of the Commonwealth told us repeatedly that, if CMAG is to become the primary conduit for the Commonwealth's moral authority, then its remit must be widened to include gross and sustained human rights abuses. That this happened back in 2002 and has passed largely unnoticed illustrates that the Group's full mandate is yet to be reflected in its actions. It is seen as being too timid and afraid of causing offence and we have encountered an almost unanimous desire to see it used more effectively.

The Group is made up of nine rotating Foreign Ministers. It is up to member states – those with representatives currently in the Group, but others also – to see it used to its full potential. The review, endorsed by the 2009 CHOGM, into how CMAG can more effectively fulfil its remit is welcome. There is no doubt that this mechanism, properly used, could go a long way towards turning the Commonwealth into an association that lives out its principles.

Finally, "walking the talk" must also mean the whole Commonwealth family using every opportunity to promote the association's values and principles through their work, no matter what their field. Commonwealth organisations have networks across all sectors of society, from businesspeople to dentists, from parliamentarians to lawyers and from HIV/AIDS professionals to PHD students. We have been told that some civil society organisations have very little to do with the basic precepts of the Commonwealth and simply use the Commonwealth tag as a convenient way to gain an international presence or to plug into a natural network. Many of their staff, and even more of their members, know little about the association whose name is featured in their organisation's title.

The word 'Commonwealth' is in common parlance and there is no scope for implementing any kind of watchdog function over the 'brand'. However, there is potential for making the civil society accreditation process much more robust (see [Recommendation 4](#)) and for encouraging those organisations who are committed to upholding the Commonwealth's values and principles to realise that, in taking the Commonwealth to the world, they are the frontline. It is crucial that their work brings the Commonwealth's values to life in a real way.

2. Lead from the front

The Commonwealth needs stronger leadership. Whether it is Heads of Government speaking together, the Chairperson-in-Office representing the association or statements from the Secretary-General, the Commonwealth needs to clear its throat and find a more powerful voice for the world stage.

An obvious place to start would be the post of Secretary-General. The Commonwealth is a vast association of 54 countries; without a strong leader at the helm of the Secretariat, the ship is rudderless. Member states choose and appoint the Secretary-General; they must decide what role the Commonwealth needs this person to play. They must choose whether they want a vessel for their consensus messages or a more proactive voice to uphold the association's values publicly. The former may well be safe and inoffensive, but if the Secretary-General were to adopt a more visible role, it would do a great deal to raise the profile of the Commonwealth, to define its modern identity and, in so doing, to tackle the misperceptions and apathy which surround it.

During the Conversation, whenever the subject of leadership was raised, Sir Shridath Ramphal, who held the post of Secretary-General between 1975 and 1990, was referred to again and again. Some have dismissed this as “rampant Ramphalitis” confined to “octogenarian Commonwealth groupies”, but our research shows that his style of leadership in fact attracted admiration from a much wider group of stakeholders.

Malcolm Fraser, the former Prime Minister of Australia said: “(Sonny Ramphal) was an activist. He annoyed some heads of government who didn't want an activist or somebody who could get up and very forcibly put forward points of view. But I actually believe that Sonny Ramphal is the sort of Secretary-General that the Commonwealth ought to have. Since his time, Secretaries-General have been much quieter.”

We have been told that Ramphal was an innately political animal, unafraid of causing offence when he felt a situation called for strong words or actions. He was not prepared to compromise on principles for the sake of a quiet life. Tellingly, his term in office did not see a mass exodus of offended countries; rather it was a time of dynamism and influence for a Commonwealth that achieved tangible change.

Strong leadership is not about seeking a quick headline. Where work can be carried out most effectively behind closed doors, through the Secretary-General's ‘Good Offices’, then the intergovernmental Commonwealth should take this option. But this should not be used as a catch-all excuse for an overly timid Commonwealth. The need to be seen as a “trusted partner” by member states must be constantly balanced with the need to be trusted to uphold principles, to push for change and not to back down in the face of potential controversy.

The Gambia is a case in point. We were told during the Conversation that requests from the Commonwealth Secretariat for access and talks with the government had been flatly refused. Yet still, with apparently no bridges left to burn, the Commonwealth failed to speak out. This revelation has been met with an equal measure of despair and frustration, particularly by those who remember a Commonwealth that used to operate very differently. Speaking out need not necessarily entail condemnation. It may involve a statement of concern and a public admission that requests for talks have so far been refused. At least then, people have argued, the world would know that the Commonwealth is trying to do something, rather than standing passively by.

One participant at a consultation event in Canada put it this way, “Currently the Commonwealth has nothing to say about the issues that matter most to the world. That is why people have nothing to say about the Commonwealth.”

We have oft heard the argument from staff of the intergovernmental Commonwealth that they “function within certain parameters”. “We are restrained in what we can say about homosexuality in

Uganda or human rights abuses in the Gambia. It is important to be realistic: the Secretary-General must find his way through the miasma of 54 governments whilst remaining true to the Commonwealth's principles." This is undoubtedly an important balance to strike. Yet our research suggests that, in the last twenty years, the balance has slipped heavily in one direction. Leadership of the Commonwealth has become far more intently focused on keeping 54 governments happy and on maintaining the status quo than it has on "remaining true to the Commonwealth's principles". The emphasis has changed: more Secretary, less General. Member states, as well as other Commonwealth constituents, must ask themselves whether this is the best thing for the association.

At the level of governments, the Commonwealth operates by consensus. This is one of its unique features and intrinsic to the way it works. But if the Secretary-General is confined to voicing only those messages that have been passed through the filter of 54 governments, then the Commonwealth consigns itself to having no strong public voice. If all member states could agree that the association needs a Secretary-General with the authority to uphold publicly the association's ideals, ideals that they have all signed up to, then its identity, profile and influence would be strengthened.

The question of Commonwealth Headship also sparked lively discussion during the Conversation. It is clear that, whilst the vast majority of people greatly admire the role Queen Elizabeth II has played in uniting and guiding the Commonwealth, there is significant debate about whether this role should be passed on to the next British monarch when the time comes. Many people are vehemently opposed to the idea, declaring that, if the Commonwealth is ever to shake off its colonial past, then such a move would be unconscionable. Others claim that the Commonwealth should not throw away tradition and that only the next monarch could play the kind of unifying and stable role that has so benefited the association for the last sixty years. The allocation of this role will send a powerful message about the identity of the Commonwealth today and we have unearthed a great desire, from people on all sides of the argument, to see the issue properly and openly debated before circumstances force a snap decision. This is something that all Commonwealth leaders should take seriously.

A similar discussion needs to happen about the role of Chairperson-in-office. This role, created in 1999, is adopted by a different Commonwealth leader every two years according to which country is playing host to the CHOGM. The position is a source of considerable confusion, even to those within the Commonwealth family, with people unsure what the role entails and what authority it brings. Given that only a relatively small number of Commonwealth countries are in a position to host a CHOGM (a massive financial and logistical undertaking), we have also heard criticism that the role of Chairperson is inevitably destined to be passed around the same small group of countries, its incumbents unrepresentative of the Commonwealth as a whole.

A greater clarification of these three key leadership positions –Secretary-General, Head and Chairperson – and their relationship to one another would be welcome.

It is worth noting, having said this, that an exclusively top-down approach to leadership creates imbalance. More effective Commonwealth leadership could also involve the appointment of Commonwealth Champions or Ambassadors. They might be prominent professionals in any field, from business to health, who take on a responsibility for independently promoting the Commonwealth in their everyday work, or for acting as figureheads for certain Commonwealth initiatives. The UN, and several large international NGOs, already operate similar schemes, employing celebrities to raise the profile of particular areas of work. Having other people sing your praises is far more effective than singing your own. (This approach is addressed in more detail in **Recommendation 7**.)

3. Innovate and be bold

From Australia to Zimbabwe, Port Louis to Port of Spain, many who took part in the Conversation told us that they saw the Commonwealth as anachronistic and fusty; an association with its best days behind it. When asked to list its achievements, none but the most expert of Commonwealth insiders could name anything from the last two decades. At a more mundane level, we were told that many of the systems, working methods, and procedures used by Commonwealth organisations are old fashioned and out of touch.

The most effective way of tackling these perceptions and simultaneously reaching out to a new generation will be for all members of the Commonwealth family to be bolder and more innovative in what they do and how they do it. Initiatives should capture the world's imagination and project a refreshingly modern international organisation rooted in the present, not in the past. Whether in the way the Secretariat conducts its expert groups or the way Commonwealth civil society organisations run their programmes, innovation should be the hallmark of new Commonwealth initiatives. This type of action would be worth more to the Commonwealth than any expensive advertising campaign.

In 2009, a woman called Felicity Aston decided to embark upon an expedition to the South Pole. She put together a team of women, each from a different Commonwealth country and none of whom had ever undertaken such a challenge before, in order to see whether, in the face of enormous cultural, racial and religious differences, they could achieve something remarkable. To all intents and purposes, she was putting the Commonwealth ideal to the test. Having secured enough sponsorship to cover the cost of the endeavour, the Kaspersky Commonwealth Women's Antarctic Expedition set out in November 2009. They reached the geographic South Pole on 29th December. Their remarkable ambition and achievement brought the Commonwealth, its unity across diversity, its shared challenges and shared strength, to life in an inspirational way which has resonated with people around the world. This is the kind of bold, innovative thinking that should be repeated throughout the Commonwealth family.

The Royal Commonwealth Society is an organisation that has existed since 1868. Some of our projects have been run for more than 100 years and there is great value in this proud history. Yet it is also incumbent upon us to ensure that our work remains relevant to today's world. We must continually rethink what we do and how we do it to ensure that we have the greatest positive impact and, as the oldest and largest civil society organisation devoted to the Commonwealth, project the modern association as it is today. The Commonwealth Conversation reflects, in itself, one aspect of our attempt to do this. But it has also done much to open our own eyes to the true urgency of the need for innovation and modernisation. Taking this on board, in 2010, we are planning what looks set to be our most ambitious project to date. The Commonwealth Climate Challenge will see households in 12 countries across the world compete to reduce their environmental impact over the course of one year. As we monitor their journeys, we hope to highlight the many different shared challenges faced by communities across the Commonwealth and the action that can start to be taken to tackle the ever-growing risks of climate change. We estimate that we will need to secure at least £1.5 million in support to see this project come to fruition. But we are confident that it is of sufficient value and interest to attract this sort of investment. We are aiming high and we hope that, in whatever way they can, other members of the Commonwealth family will do the same.

Often during the Conversation, when discussing what the Commonwealth could do to capture the imagination of a new generation, Commonwealth insiders have insisted we must push to see it included in school curricula, particularly in Great Britain where our poll results showed that the association's profile is lowest. Yet we also encountered a deep sense of frustration with this attitude. Nobody has argued that to have the Commonwealth taught as a subject in schools would be a bad thing. But pushing for this in the face of overwhelming indifference from education authorities is attempting to force a solution without addressing the real problem.

Commonwealth insiders would be well-advised to ask themselves why, at a time when young people arguably learn more about international affairs than ever before, curriculum planners do not see fit to

put the Commonwealth high on their list of priorities. The answer, we would suggest, is that it does not appear to be an important part of today's international global architecture; it does not seem relevant to the lives of young people or their futures. In this report, we identify several fundamental reasons for that and suggest ways they can be tackled. Anyone who cares about the Commonwealth should focus on these challenges first and foremost: they must be the priority. Then there is every chance that the Commonwealth would re-enter school textbooks because it deserves to be there; because it is so important and relevant that for anyone seeking to introduce young people to the world around them, to leave it out, would amount to an error of judgement.

The same argument goes for encouraging greater study of the Commonwealth at university. One academic taking part in a Conversation event remarked that, in the 1970s and 80s there was very little academic interest in the UN as it appeared rather irrelevant during the Cold War. But in the 1990s, when the UN Security Council became more hard-hitting, students loved learning about it and demand for UN courses sky-rocketed. If the Commonwealth were to undergo the same political renaissance, no doubt people would be clamouring to create Institutes for Commonwealth Studies all over the world.

The Commonwealth must exist as a living, dynamic association for young people: one that they see acting in the world around them, making a difference, standing up for ideals and principles they believe in. If it is reduced to a dry subject, a series of historical dates, facts and flags in schools, we risk perpetuating the perception that it is a thing of the past.

Part of being innovative and bold will also involve shaking off an aversion to controversy. At times, this aversion seems to strangle the intergovernmental Commonwealth, but, perhaps more alarmingly still, it is a timidity that seems to have infiltrated sections of Commonwealth civil society. During the Conversation we have been encouraged to discover individuals from all sections of the Commonwealth family who display a real appetite for boldness and a real ambition for change. Their openness matches that which we encountered from participants outside Commonwealth circles. Yet, we have also encountered a willingness to accept the status quo, a reluctance to rock the boat and a defensiveness which treats change as something to mistrust. '*Common What?*', the report of our emerging findings, was met with horror in some parts, not because what we were saying was necessarily incorrect, but because, as one senior civil society leader told us, "speaking and acting in measured terms is the Commonwealth way of doing things".

Measured terms have their place, but our consultations have revealed an urgent need for the Commonwealth to think afresh about the brave and innovative ways in which it can reinvent itself in the eyes of the world. Measured terms must not be used as an excuse for avoiding uncomfortable truths. Any organisation, committed to building a healthy future, must be prepared to open itself up to constructive and honest criticism. The Commonwealth has so many positives and so many strengths. It need not be defensive and it should not be afraid.

4. Prove worth

We have often heard Commonwealth Heads of Government Meetings, People's Forums and Ministerial Meetings unfairly dismissed as talk-shops. There is of course considerable value in the unrivalled convening power of the Commonwealth, but the association has to work harder to prove that its achievements go beyond the occasional Summit.

For example, regular updates and reviews of progress made towards the goals set out at these meetings would be helpful. 'Have we achieved what we set out to achieve two years ago?' is a question that needs to be formally built into the CHOGM process. Follow-through mechanisms and a results-based culture must also inform the way intergovernmental and civil society Commonwealth bodies operate. Measuring and demonstrating impact is essential to attracting more investment. The steps already being taken by the intergovernmental Commonwealth in this area are welcome, but we have heard from several key donors and member governments that much more must be done.

One senior government official complained that "The Commonwealth Secretariat lacks a delivery culture...We don't know whose job it is to deliver against assigned tasks. We don't know who to hold accountable". More worryingly, officials from *two* of the Commonwealth's largest donor governments told us independently that they generally do not attempt to use the same evaluation measures required of most grants when it comes to Commonwealth projects. "We give money out of historical obligation and write it off", one said. "We donate to the Commonwealth for political and historical reasons, not because it represents value for money", said the other. If these views are widely held in key donor countries, then the intergovernmental Commonwealth finds itself in an unsustainable position and every effort must be made to reverse this attitude. Certainly, it is highly unlikely to attract more investment from member states until it does so. (See [Recommendation 6](#).)

In their defence, employees of the intergovernmental Commonwealth have told us that all major donors now view much of their grant-making through the prism of the Millennium Development Goals (MDG). The Commonwealth's small-scale programmes and demand-led support do not always fit squarely within this framework. This makes meeting donor's monitoring and evaluation requests more difficult. This assertion, though clearly valid, is not entirely backed up by donor governments themselves. They told us that what they want to see is "strong results-based management and good project design". This, they said, would be perfectly adequate for enabling them to measure the impact of the intergovernmental Commonwealth's efforts, even if it strays beyond MDGs and into less quantifiable areas of development.

Impact must also be effectively communicated to a wider range of stakeholders. The Commonwealth's values and principles can seem idealistic in a results-driven world. When they are translated into tangible change, as they were in shaping positive commitments to emerge from the Copenhagen Climate Conference in late 2009, it is absolutely crucial that these achievements are not allowed to slip silently under the radar. As one participant in the Conversation put it "The Commonwealth will never talk its way back to relevance; it has to show what it is doing."

An evaluation of impact and efficacy should also be built into a more robust civil society accreditation process. This would provide an incentive for Commonwealth organisations to modernise and almost certainly reap the benefits in terms of increased funding. At present, there are 73 associated and accredited organisations in the Commonwealth family. Most of them are small – indeed we estimate that around a third have no employed staff – and only a few seem to engage actively in promoting the work or ideals of the Commonwealth (as opposed to networking across the Commonwealth). We have heard the argument that tightening the accreditation process would reduce civil society interest in the Commonwealth more generally. There are certainly questions to be answered in terms of what accreditation to the Commonwealth offers an organisation and whether these incentives can be strengthened. Yet, our research suggests that accreditation to the Commonwealth would be more attractive in itself if it indicated something about the standard of an organisation and guaranteed links into a vibrant, professional network of organisations. Pruning or consolidating the less active Commonwealth civil society bodies would enable a healthier Commonwealth family to flourish.

5. Exploit unique strengths

The intergovernmental Commonwealth operates on a tiny budget in comparison to other international organisations. Its annual budget is around one percent of that of the UK Department for International Development and it has half a percent of the number of staff in the UN system.¹ Even when you take Commonwealth civil society into account, we estimate that there are only around 1,000 staff employed in all intergovernmental, associated and accredited organisations. There is an urgent need not to spread these limited resources too thinly. If the Commonwealth is to avoid becoming increasingly marginalised, it must identify ways of working in which it brings unique value and it must maximise this comparative advantage.

Ultimately, it is member states who set the intergovernmental Commonwealth's priorities. They must reassess what functions the Commonwealth can fulfil more effectively than any other multilateral organisation. They must then demand that this is where the intergovernmental Commonwealth focuses its time, expertise and resources in order to produce a clear, targeted mandate and a sharp identity.

The Commonwealth's lack of a strong, defining purpose first became plainly evident to us when we asked people to name the key issues they thought the Commonwealth should be focussing on. The list, gathered from lay, but also expert Conversation participants, was extensive. From terrorism to food shortages, the financial crisis to education, climate change to election observations; it went on and on.

On the back of this, we suggested in '*Common What?*', that the Commonwealth needed to prioritise its activities. Many people took this to mean that we were recommending picking one, or a couple, of particularly topical issues and dispensing with the rest of the Commonwealth's work. This was not our intention. Instead, we were arguing that it may be more strategic to become known for a few key areas of expertise, in the same way that Commonwealth was best-known in previous decades for its role in Southern Africa, despite then working in many more areas than it does today. But the more important way to address the challenge that we believe our research has thrown up begins first and foremost with identifying the Commonwealth's unique selling point.

Twenty years ago the Commonwealth was leading the way in bringing to international attention issues which remain of key relevance. Climate change and sea level rise are primary examples. But there is a strong sense that, for the past decade or so, the association has become "content to follow the agenda of other international groupings", as one former employee of the intergovernmental Commonwealth put it.

Complacency might be a more apposite word than contentment. The marketplace of international organisations has changed beyond recognition in the past twenty years. Leaders of member states now have a whole host of international and regional institutions to which they can turn depending on their concern. In the face of this new and overwhelming competition, it seems that a clear sense of the Commonwealth's unique purpose and value-added has been drowned out. Until the full range of Commonwealth stakeholders make a concerted effort to re-determine what this comparative advantage could be, successive leaders will turn to the association less and less.

¹ The intergovernmental Commonwealth's budget for 2009/10 is around £60 million (i.e. including the Commonwealth Secretariat, Commonwealth Foundation and Commonwealth of Learning). See <http://www.thecommonwealth.org/Internal/180412/>, http://www.commonwealthfoundation.com/uploads/fckeditor/00000196_Commonwealth_Foundation_Annual_Report_2009_web_sml.pdf and <http://www.col.org/SiteCollectionDocuments/colauditedFS2009.pdf>. The budget for DFID in 2008/9 was around £6 billion. See <http://www.dfid.gov.uk/Documents/publications/departamental-report/2009/volume1.pdf>. We estimate that there are some 350 staff working in the intergovernmental Commonwealth. There were 70,792 UN staff in 2008. See http://hr.unsystemceb.org/statistics/analysis/stats/2008/number_staff/

This will require a brutally honest reappraisal of the global institutional architecture. When we raised the question of the association's unique strengths, Commonwealth insiders were often quick to cite its work in protecting the interests of small island states and giving these countries a voice on the world stage. It is true that the Commonwealth has done much work in this area, including pioneering a system to give small states a presence at the United Nations through the creation of the Joint Office for Commonwealth Permanent Missions to the United Nations in 1983.

But, even in terms of small islands, our research uncovered evidence that the Commonwealth has been superseded in this area as in so many others. Take the example of AOSIS, the Alliance of Small Island States. This coalition of small island and low-lying countries now has 42 members who have grouped together because they share similar development challenges and concerns about the environment, especially in terms of their vulnerability to the adverse effects of global climate change. It seems that AOSIS has displaced the Commonwealth as the pre-eminent forum and voice for small island states. This impression was reinforced by our consultations with relevant member governments, especially those who had seen the work of AOSIS at the Copenhagen Climate Conference in December 2009. It is crucial that the Commonwealth does not assume that it continues to have a monopoly over the unique roles it once played. In many cases, it has been left behind.

In recommending that particular ways of working be developed into unique strengths, let us give one example that was suggested by a number of contributors. Responsible governance has been at the heart of the Commonwealth project since its inception in 1949. Indeed, we have heard many people refer to democracy and good governance as the Commonwealth's "core business". Whether consultation services (election monitoring, the Secretary-General's Good offices function), capacity building (training of parliamentarians) or accountability (CMAG, or the applicability of Latimer House Guidelines on Parliamentary Supremacy and Judicial Independence), much of the Commonwealth's work revolves around defending democratic principles. Providing enhanced capacity building support for governments surrounding the international governance element of emerging global issues could retain the flexibility and adaptability of the organisation, whilst maximising one of its unique selling points. If the Commonwealth were to refine its framework in this way, the nature of the association would become much clearer to donors (see **Recommendation 4**), leaders and the public.

The uniquely wide, interregional spread of the Commonwealth and its convening power in an increasingly multi-polar world was also cited as a core strength. If this, combined with the Commonwealth's ability to act as a forum to reconcile differences and reach bases for international agreements, were exploited much more effectively, the Commonwealth would grow in dynamism and influence. The intergovernmental Commonwealth's ability to offer quick, non-conditional services to member states is another oft-cited example.

Our point is not that the intergovernmental Commonwealth should necessarily focus on one issue at the cost of others; rather that it should distil what unique attributes and ways of working it can bring to the table and focus on those where it can.

At the level of Commonwealth civil society, many disparate interests are a sign of health and vibrancy. And, indeed, civil society bodies by their very nature should be free to focus on any area they wish. However, it is important that they too identify the Commonwealth's unique capacities, particularly when it comes to interacting with the intergovernmental Commonwealth. When Commonwealth civil society come together to present their list of concerns to leaders at Heads of Government Meetings, it would aid their cause and the reforms proposed in these recommendations, if they could identify exactly how the Commonwealth, as opposed to another international association, could make a difference on particular issues. Commonwealth civil society organisations may themselves focus on every issue under the sun, but they should not expect leaders, who meet so rarely and for such a short time, to do the same.

6. Invest

In the twenty years from 1989 to 2009 the budget of the Commonwealth Secretariat (including the Commonwealth Fund for Technical Cooperation and the Commonwealth Youth Programme), dropped in real terms by 21%, even though the number of Commonwealth members increased from 48 to 54. The scale of assessment which determines the contributions made by member states to the Secretariat was finally updated in November 2009, after remaining unchanged for more than twenty years. This is a welcome step in the right direction, but it hasn't changed the size of the pie; it has merely rearranged the slices.

At no other point during the Conversation did we encounter such an entrenched difference of opinion as on the subject of investment. The perspectives of member states and the intergovernmental Commonwealth are fundamentally at loggerheads and, if progress is to be made, there will need to be concessions on both sides.

Intergovernmental Commonwealth staff complain bitterly that they are unable to deliver what member states are asking of them because they are woefully under-resourced. They – and other long-standing observers of the Commonwealth – claim that it is member states who consign the Commonwealth to irrelevance by failing to invest. One senior intergovernmental Commonwealth employee used the Conversation itself as an example: “The FCO funded the Conversation, asking how can you make the Commonwealth more effective? The question should really have been how can they make the Commonwealth more effective?” We have heard the failure to update member subscriptions for more than twenty years described as “the slow strangulation of the organisation”. “Until our large shareholders choose to resource us, we can battle and battle but we won't get anywhere”, said one employee of the intergovernmental Commonwealth.

Staff have also argued that they cannot galvanise the member states: “we are their servants”, as they put it. “The shareholders need to wake up to the precious value they're sitting on.” But our research suggests that, if the intergovernmental Commonwealth is planning to sit back until member states open their eyes, they are in for a long wait before major new investment comes their way.

Representatives from member state governments, for their part, have told us that they are reluctant to give more money until they see their current contributions being far better utilised. Unsatisfied with the current impact of the intergovernmental Commonwealth's work, and struggling through the global economic downturn, they remain utterly unconvinced that any increase in investment will bring them the returns they are looking for. In this respect, **Recommendations 4 and 5** are crucial. The intergovernmental Commonwealth must become much smarter about how it maximises the impact and returns on the small resources it does have. The Commonwealth's low resources are a reflection of the changed landscape in which it now operates. The strategic interests of its primary funders lie elsewhere. Member states and the intergovernmental Commonwealth must work together to determine exactly what it is that the association can provide that other international organisations cannot. Until this is clear, there is no reason why member states should invest in the Commonwealth and not elsewhere. This is a deadlock which must be broken if any progress is to be made.

Investment in human resources is also crucial. A number of old Commonwealth hands have criticised the employment regulations and processes in the Commonwealth Secretariat which have been said to demoralise staff and prevent them working to the best of their ability. We have been told that making sure that the intergovernmental Commonwealth offers the pay and conditions to attract and retain the highest quality candidates will be as important in improving its overall effectiveness as any additional funding.

At the level of Commonwealth civil society, organisations need to become much more ambitious and innovative in sourcing new funds. With the right ‘product’, funding is available even in these fiscally difficult times. Civil society bodies must look beyond Commonwealth circles and be open to forming new partnerships.

Investment is also needed at a capacity level. As noted in **Recommendation 4**, too many Commonwealth civil society organisations are staffed solely by longstanding volunteers. This is not to

diminish their work or their commitment. Rather, as one civil society representative said during the Conversation, “Commonwealth civil society and professional bodies are too aged, too male and too white. They are also too UK based. They are not representative of the young Commonwealth. But they are devoted to it”. Unless concerted efforts are made to bring in a new generation of employees and volunteers, many of these organisations face extinction. A huge amount of the Commonwealth's best work stands to be lost, should they be allowed simply to fade away.

Many are also hindered by old-fashioned working methods. The Commonwealth Foundation provides small core grants to around one third of these Commonwealth associations, but a comprehensive review to map the challenges they face and to identify areas where practical capacity-building could be offered would be welcome. Some excellent toolkits do exist for use by these organisations, for example on mainstreaming youth participation, but there is a lot more support that could usefully be given. (This should be seen in partnership with a more robust accreditation process, as outlined in **Recommendation 4**.) During the Conversation, the most ardent supporters of these recommendations have been members of the very civil society organisations we are referring to. We hope that their ambition will result in tangible change.

7. Communicate clearly

Throughout the Conversation, we were struck by how low the Commonwealth's profile is. When we started to dig deeper into the reasons for this, we unearthed some fundamental problems, the most serious of which were nothing to do with publicity, branding or communications. They were a failure to live out principles, a lack of clear leadership, an inability to prioritise or prove impact and a lack of investment in people. Addressing these areas (see **Recommendations 1 to 6**) would produce a healthier, more dynamic Commonwealth with a strong, modern identity. As a by-product, this would raise the profile of the association which would then feed back into a healthier Commonwealth, driving a virtuous cycle.

Focusing on communications alone is like treating the symptom of a problem and not the cause; like putting a coat of fresh paint over a crumbling edifice.

More coherent and effective communication is one important element of a comprehensive approach to long-term revitalisation. We have heard time and again that it is difficult to communicate what the Commonwealth is or does. People tell us that it is many things to many people. It is a hugely complex association of governments and peoples, of shared history and shared goals, of relationships and networks. But, given that we have encountered so much misunderstanding about what the Commonwealth is today, an attempt to restate its purpose and identity in the 21st century, despite this complexity, would seem to be crucial.

Many people have suggested that a Commonwealth Charter could be one effective way of doing this. At the November 2009 Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting, a Statement of Values and Principles was endorsed by leaders. This was an admirable effort to distil what the Commonwealth stands for, but seems to have been undertaken without any public consultation and little public impact. The affirmation stretches to 16 paragraphs and, rather than being a standalone statement, refers back to five previous Commonwealth Declarations. It lists the Commonwealth's core values and principles from 'human rights' to 'inclusiveness', but does not indicate how these ideals mark the Commonwealth out as different from any other international body, for example the UN, which uses similarly lofty language.

Previous Commonwealth Declarations, such as the Commonwealth Latimer House Principles or the Harare Declaration, do communicate unique aspects of the Commonwealth. Drawing their messages into one concise, easily understandable document which is endorsed by the full range of Commonwealth stakeholders would be of great value. In terms of words, this would be the one-stop shop for anyone interested in finding out what the Commonwealth stands for today and where it fits into the contemporary global institutional architecture.

There is also much to be said for all members of the Commonwealth family arriving at a more sophisticated understanding of how to implement an effective communications strategy. Some members of the Commonwealth family seem obsessed by the idea that if they only shouted louder about how good they are, the profile problem would be solved. "We have an enormous reservoir of examples of the impact of the Commonwealth – where do we broadcast them?", as one participant put it. It is important to remember that this is only one aspect of a communications drive.

Effective communications is not about organising more press conferences, writing more letters to newspaper editors, or peddling good news stories (though there is a time and place for these as we noted in **Recommendation 4**). In a connected, consumer-driven age, we have become much savvier about what we buy into. People no longer book a hotel, or buy a new gadget, without first looking on other websites that provide independent customer reviews. In places where the internet does not reach, reviews in newspapers or on the radio are just as important. Putting out spin about your own work (or your own product) will only get you so far. It is far more important to listen to what other people are saying about you, engage with it and respond to it. It is almost impossible to correct people's misperceptions and negative associations, without first listening to what these are and trying to understand where they stem from.

The Commonwealth Conversation has undoubtedly created the space for airing a lot of criticism about the Commonwealth, but it didn't generate any that didn't already exist. (Quite the opposite, the feedback we received suggests that the Conversation, if anything, has got more people thinking about the Commonwealth and hopefully improved many people's perceptions of the association.) The Conversation simply sought to engage with people's views and opinions, to encourage constructive debate and develop new ideas. This kind of engagement is something the Commonwealth must not shy away from. If its risk-averse, defensive attitude permeates its communications strategy, so that it talks at people, rather than with them, attempting to paint a uniformly positive picture of itself, its constituents will become ever more disengaged and cynical.

It is not only what people say, but who says it that counts. As we were writing this report, the President of South Africa, Jacob Zuma, gave an interview to the London-based *Financial Times*. Fresh from his experience at the CHOGM in Trinidad and Tobago, in the first five minutes of the interview, he talked almost exclusively about the Commonwealth. What he said was not entirely positive. He suggested that the Commonwealth has only been dealing with issues "very softly" and could have a more "well-organised voice" on the world stage. But, for many of the newspaper's half a million readers, this may have been the first time (if not ever then in a long time) that they had heard the Commonwealth being talked about by a head of state as an association of relevance on the world stage; as an organisation that leaders are using to make a difference. If more heads of member states or their ministers talked publicly in this way about the Commonwealth, its profile would be greatly strengthened. They must not see responsibility for this as lying solely at the feet of the Commonwealth Secretariat and its small communications division.

Having said all this, we have been struck by how many people within the Commonwealth family remain unconvinced that a low profile matters. They have argued that this problem is shared by all international organisations. Yet unlike others, our research shows that the Commonwealth is lumbered with imperial baggage and misunderstanding. This assertion (which we also made in 'Common What?') drew criticism from some quarters. One longstanding member of Commonwealth civil society expressed their indignation thus: "You seem to be the only ones focusing on the history of the Commonwealth – the rest of us have moved on from the Anglophone centric organisation to the modern Commonwealth of Nations". Yet our research shows this to be manifestly untrue. In our opinion leaders survey, the most popular answer to 'What does the Commonwealth mean to you?', were the words 'empire' or 'colonialism'. Insiders may know this perception of the modern association to be far from the truth, but, if they have moved on, they have failed to bring public opinion with them. Everyone in the Commonwealth family must proactively seek to dispel damaging connotations by clearly demonstrating and communicating the association's relevance in the 21st century, rather than the 20th.

We have also been met with the argument, particularly from the intergovernmental Commonwealth, that a low profile amongst the general public is irrelevant because the association is still reaching its key constituents – the member states. Yet surely ignorance of the Commonwealth amongst the general public does matter, after all, it is taxpayers who foot the bill and electors who vote in the political leaders who sign the cheque. Perhaps more importantly still, our research suggests that low profile is not confined to the public alone and that the Commonwealth's reputation amongst government stakeholders is not quite what it should be. An alarming number of key policy makers, when asked, are at a loss to explain how the Commonwealth benefits their country.

Profile matters, but any improved communications strategy will be meaningless unless backed up with the change we call for in **Recommendations 1 to 6**. Words are important, but they are not sufficient; they must be matched by substantive action.

8. Short is sweet

Lengthy communiqués and statements appear unfocused, impenetrable and unattainable. This is not merely a point about presentation. A concise summary would be more usable by the media and more accessible to the public. But the more important point is about prioritisation, setting clear goals and creating a workable, easy-to-monitor mandate for the Commonwealth at both intergovernmental and civil society levels.

The communiqué issued from the 2009 CHOGM is an interminable list of largely unrelated topics running to 117 paragraphs. The subjects it addresses are endless – disarmament and arms control, terrorism, migration, human rights, the economy, trade, investment, climate change, food security, energy security, education, youth, the digital divide...to name but a few. None is given prominence over another and there is no indication of a workable agenda for the Secretariat for the coming two years. And this communiqué does not stand alone. There were five other statements produced by leaders at CHOGM, adding another 69 paragraphs to the mêlée. “Commonwealth communiqués include everything except the kitchen sink”, one senior official at a consultation event told us.

It is unavoidable that 54 countries will all bring different issues to the table and indeed this sharing of experience is one of the Commonwealth’s great strengths. When leaders meet at CHOGMs, it is inevitable, and encouraging, that they discuss a huge range of topics. But these discussions do not all need to find their way into the communiqué; at some point decisions must be made and priorities must be set. The intergovernmental Commonwealth has finite resources; it cannot solve all of the world’s problems.

In terms of civil society statements, the same principles apply. The 2009 Civil Society statement was a mammoth 134 paragraphs. If this document is to be used as a tool for lobbying governments, it must become more focused. Listing every concern lessens the impact of them all. (This is closely linked to **Recommendations 4 and 5**.)

We heard from members of Commonwealth civil society that paragraphs in the CHOGM communiqué or civil society statement are “hard fought for” and that “if we push for brevity, these will be the first to go”. But getting particular topics into a communiqué is only worthwhile if that document will be used as a workable mandate to guide activities for the coming two years. If the communiqué becomes an unwieldy list of endless concerns that is filed quietly away until a new one is written two years later, nothing has been achieved. We know that the Commonwealth Foundation has taken steps to make the civil society statement a ‘living’ document, but more could be done to identify priority actions set to a workable timeline. Member governments in particular seem to be hugely supportive of this recommendation.

9. Interact

For an association that prides itself on its commitment to democracy and inclusiveness, a remarkable amount of the intergovernmental Commonwealth's work is carried out behind closed doors. An unrivalled network of civil society and professional bodies carries forward the voice and concerns of the people. If the Commonwealth is as much an association of peoples as it is of governments, they are shut out at risk to the modern relevance of the association.

For this reason, current plans to reform the processes and mechanisms for interaction between civil society and the intergovernmental Commonwealth prior to Heads of Government Meetings are welcome. We heard so many complaints about this during the Conversation that it is obvious there is much to be done.

We also heard calls for the relationship between the institutions of the intergovernmental Commonwealth and the peoples of Commonwealth countries to be clarified. The need for this clarification is brought into sharpest focus when a country is suspended or withdraws from the Commonwealth. In the 1970s, when the Commonwealth was playing a pioneering role in tackling apartheid in South Africa, the country was a non-member. Despite the actions of their government, the South African people still needed political support. Yet today, the Commonwealth Secretariat and member states seem reluctant to stand behind the people of Zimbabwe or Fiji, be it politically or otherwise, and it is left to Commonwealth civil society to try and maintain people to people links.

The Eminent Persons Group, endorsed by leaders at the November 2009 CHOGM and tasked with exploring options for reform, provides another obvious chance for meaningful interaction. The group will operate within an intergovernmental framework. Yet there is significant scope for its members to interact with civil society, to be open and transparent and to draw on the valuable expertise of a broad cross section of Commonwealth stakeholders. If they carry out private consultations before producing a worthy report destined to be filed quietly away on a dusty shelf, a huge opportunity will have been missed.

The announcement that leaders at the 2009 CHOGM had called for an Eminent Persons Group to explore options for reform was met with a mixture of delight, scepticism and downright anger by Conversation participants. Delight because many were hopeful that such a group could make a real difference at the highest level; scepticism because many felt they would probably produce a weighty tome which would be welcomed by Commonwealth leaders and then never acted upon; and anger because many felt that the response of a modern association to calls for reform should not be to set up an Eminent Persons Group, something which is seen as a stuffy and old-fashioned way of working.

Commonwealth member states can turn expectations on their head. Who they appoint to the Group will matter almost as much as how they conduct their review. "Elderly Commonwealth luvvies", as one participant described them, will not cut the mustard. Nor will flying around the world to exotic locations for a series of closed-door meetings with the usual suspects.

The Commonwealth Conversation is testimony to the value of letting people become involved in a process which can effect real change. It has inspired and harnessed enthusiasm and produced ideas which (we hope) will be of lasting value to all Commonwealth stakeholders. The Eminent Person's Group should not dismiss its lessons, nor the vast amount of material that it has collected.

10. Reach more people

Our research has shown that when the Commonwealth's work directly touches the lives of individuals, it has a hugely positive impact. The majority of this kind of work is carried out by Commonwealth civil society bodies that more naturally operate at a grassroots level.

One of the most popular topics on the Conversation website was the value of Commonwealth scholarships. Dozens of people spoke passionately about the transformative impact of these educational opportunities on their lives. For the small number of people who have been directly touched by programmes such as this, the Commonwealth has real significance and enjoys lasting support. A *Round Table* scholar from Canada told us: "The Commonwealth is very much defined by personal experiences. For the vast majority of people, it isn't about good offices or good governance workshops; it's about the fact that they got a scholarship, won an essay prize, (or) went to a Commonwealth country for their gap year because they spoke English there. This is the "invisible glue" of the Commonwealth that people talk about."

Yet, for an association that prides itself on diversity and equality, the charge of elitism is levelled at the Commonwealth far too often. Most of its work, at the intergovernmental and non-governmental level, either has no direct impact on the lives of individuals or only reaches the lucky few. Given that people whose lives have been directly affected by Commonwealth initiatives are often the association's most fervent admirers, this is a criticism worth addressing.

This is not to advocate spreading limited resources more thinly. Our research identified the transformative impact of the Commonwealth's work on the lives of individuals as a key strength. In line with **Recommendation 5**, this now needs to be maximised. To do this, Commonwealth bodies, and civil society organisations in particular, need to make strategic changes to the way they operate, becoming more outward-looking and less insular, as well as embracing new technology which can broaden reach at little extra cost.

This recommendation, that the Commonwealth seeks to maximise its direct impact on people, has been dismissed as irrelevant to the Commonwealth Secretariat. "We don't do anything for Joe Bloggs in a developed country; that isn't our role", as one staff member put it. There may be some truth in this, but the recommendation about reaching wider is not confined to the general public. Our research shows that key officials, Prime Ministers and Presidents are a crucial target audience. As we said in **Recommendation 7**, an alarming number of the policymakers we spoke to during the Conversation were at a loss to name one thing they would turn to the Commonwealth for, as opposed to other institutions. Perhaps the fact that leaders do not publicly talk about the Commonwealth enough is because it does not feature high on their priority list; they're not sure why they would refer to the Commonwealth instead of any other number of international and regional institutions. This is something, through all the various means we have discussed so far, that the whole Commonwealth family needs to work to rectify.

Reaching a wider audience also means reaching beyond Commonwealth circles. We found during our research that non-Commonwealth civil society organisations, including prominent and influential NGOs, were uninterested in Commonwealth meetings and did not view them as useful lobbying opportunities. Some Commonwealth insiders have dismissed this as unimportant, but it sends a powerful message about the poor interaction between civil society and leaders which takes place, as well as hinting that the Commonwealth is perceived as being irrelevant and impotent.

Finally, reaching more people could include making the Commonwealth more polycentric. The vast majority of its intergovernmental and most prominent nongovernmental institutions are based in London; the Commonwealth of Learning in Vancouver and the Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative in New Delhi being two notable, and successful, exceptions. This not only adds fuel to the fire of the colonial myths which surround the Commonwealth, it perpetuates an insular outlook and a limited sphere of direct influence.



4. CONCLUSION

Many people have told us that the Commonwealth's great strength is not its intergovernmental bodies, nor even its associated organisations. Rather it is the web of informal ties, shared experience, language, business links, legal frameworks and parliamentary systems that bind together countries with a shared colonial legacy. "More like a family than a factory", as one person put it.

Yet no matter what happens to the Commonwealth as an international association, these links will remain: they are embedded in members' national psyches. The aim of the Conversation and these recommendations is to ensure that, alongside this organic network, there thrives a relevant international association that makes use of these splendid assets.

As we draw to the end of the Commonwealth Conversation, it seems to us that the whole Commonwealth family is faced with a choice: settle for the status quo or aim high. There is much that is right with what the Commonwealth family currently achieves, but there is also much more that could be done.

When we published both our emerging findings and draft recommendations on the Conversation website, there was one particularly striking similarity in the way that they were received. Participants were broadly supportive of how we had consolidated their contributions and enthusiastic about what we had found. But their overriding message was that they now dearly wanted to see these findings turned into action; they wanted to see change result from all their hard work.

We encountered much cynicism about whether leaders and the inter-governmental Commonwealth would take these findings seriously. For, as much as we believe that all members of the Commonwealth family have a responsibility to act, unless these findings are accepted at the highest level, any efforts to see them translated into substantive reform will probably falter. As one website contributor put it, "These are excellent recommendations, but the key will be how Commonwealth institutions – particularly the Secretariat – will take this forward. How innovative will they be? Will they actually take people seriously? Or will it be more of the same...?" Or, as another said, "People can't change the system from the outside especially if leaders are just as set in their ways and comfort zones as the institutions set up to serve us."

The Conversation process has truly encouraged Commonwealth citizens to believe that they have a stake in the association's future; that their views matter and are being taken into account. There is a great sense now that if their findings are seen to fall on deaf ears, the initial scepticism we encountered will only be reinforced. We believe that the Commonwealth has much to gain from the contributions made during the Conversation, and much more to lose if it ignores them.

There is no doubt that, as challenging as the Conversation itself has been, implementation and substantive change represent a far greater task. Some people have suggested that the exercise in itself will ultimately be of greater significance than its conclusions. We hope not. We believe the Conversation has been beneficial in itself in many ways. It has encouraged public engagement and raised public profile. It has acted as the catalyst for constructive and open debate between different sections of the Commonwealth family. It has highlighted many of the ingredients which make the Commonwealth such a fascinating association, rich in potential. But, looking back to the project's original aims, set out in the introduction to this report, it is clear that these positive outcomes represent only part of what we set out to achieve.

We are well aware that ours is not the first such attempt to think about the future of the Commonwealth. Indeed, authors have been questioning whether the Commonwealth holds any meaning or a compelling reason for its continued existence since the 1950s. (Schneider, Fred D. 'The Commonwealth in Transition.' *The Review of Politics* 20, No. 2 (April 1958): 181-195.) Previous reviews have ranged from the highest political levels (including the most recent High Level Review in

2001) to independent research, some even under the auspices of the RCS itself (e.g. *The Future of the Commonwealth: A Golden Opportunity* (RCS, 1997) and *Reinventing the Commonwealth* (Kate Ford and Sunder Katwala, 1999). The pages of the leading Commonwealth academic journal *The Round Table* are replete with similar stock-takes (e.g. Schreuder (October 2002), Auplat (February 2007), Kaul (October 2007), Marshall (October 2009), and Ware (October 2009), as are many others. 'A Vision for the Commonwealth', a response to the 2001 High Level Review presented at the Coolum CHOGM the following year, is particularly well regarded.

But we do believe that the Conversation has already differed from previous such exercises in several key ways. It has been the first to engage a truly wide audience, from experts in the fields of democracy, development and business, to government officials to a broad cross section of the general public. It has involved consulting and engaging with people all around the world – from inside, but also from firmly outside Commonwealth circles. We have listened to their views on any and every topic, debated with them, learnt from them and then attempted to consolidate all that we found into a few thousand targeted words. We also hope it will differ from previous reviews in terms of the tangible change it provokes.

We have tried, wherever possible to show which aspects of our recommendations we believe have particular relevance to specific Commonwealth bodies. What we have not done (partly because it is beyond our remit, capacity and authority) is to set out a strategic plan for actions to be taken at all levels of the Commonwealth family. We hope instead that our findings are of sufficient credibility and persuasion to induce organisations to take this responsibility upon themselves. We have also chosen not to apply such a framework to our recommendations at this stage because, before many of them (though by no means all) can be translated into concrete action, they will need first to achieve a change in mindset, a new way of thinking, a fresh ambition. Our recommendations are as much about sparking this process and encouraging organisations to translate it into change as they are about laying out a detailed business plan for the future of the association.

At the RCS, we have already started to implement new ways of working based upon all that we have heard. The lessons of the Conversation will guide our activities for years to come. If the same can be said of a broad spectrum of fellow Commonwealth family members, then all our efforts, and those of the many who have contributed so passionately to the Conversation, will not have been in vain.

We are optimistic. Although there are pockets of resistance, we have been pleasantly surprised by the genuine enthusiasm with which so many people, long dedicated to serving the Commonwealth, have responded to the Conversation. They have selflessly shared their ideas and expertise.

It is imperative that those with ambition; those willing to challenge the status quo; those who want to see the Commonwealth thrive over the coming years continue to question, to push, to act. As we published our draft recommendations on the Conversation website, the mood of one commentator was jubilant: "I'm so happy that we did something and that we are in the process of forming an organisation that considers the public's view with great care and concern. Thank you for letting us participate in all these discussions and for bringing us together".

We also take inspiration from the winner of our 'My Commonwealth' competition (see **Annex 4**). Writing about what the Commonwealth will have achieved by 2049, the 16 year-old Singaporean winner, Quek Yihui, reflects on an association that will have promoted rapid development in Africa, that will have resolved a conflict between the US and China (apparently due in 2020!), that will have led the world in using emerging information technology to widen its reach, and that will have pioneered global efforts to tackle climate change.

Whether these will be the achievements of the Commonwealth over the next few decades, we cannot say. But it is a bold vision. And bold visions are what we need.

Annex 1: Poll Results

For best results print on A3 paper

	AUSTRALIA					CANADA					GREAT BRITAIN					INDIA					JAMAICA					MALAYSIA					SOUTH AFRICA						
	Total	Gender		Age		Total	Gender		Age		Total	Gender		Age		Total	Gender		Age		Total	Gender		Age		Total	Gender		Age								
		Male	Female	18 - 34	35 +		Male	Female	18 - 34	35 +		Male	Female	18 - 34	35 +		Male	Female	18 - 34	35 +		Male	Female	18 - 34	35 +		Male	Female	18 - 34	35 +	Male	Female	18 - 34	35 +			
Weighted Sample	1020	500	520	341	679	1020	502	518	299	721	2119	1017	1102	633	764	520	310	210	270	250	500	176	324	234	266	514	257	257	247	267	510	240	270	255	255		
Unweighted Sample	1020	500	520	341	679	1020	502	518	299	721	2119	1017	1102	633	764	520	310	210	270	250	500	176	324	234	266	514	260	254	305	205	310	240	270	255	255		
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%		
Which, if any of these international organisations do you think are valuable to your country? By valuable we mean any monetary, defence reasons etc...																																					
The United Nations (UN)	64	67	62	62	66	68	71	64	63	70	42	44	40	43	41	74	72	78	75	74	30	31	30	30	31	60	60	59	61	58	71	72	70	72	70		
The 'G8' group of major world economies						54	60	47	46	57	35	41	30	36	35	55	59	50	51	60						50	53	46	46	53							
North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO)						57	66	48	46	62	44	53	35	38	46																						
The Commonwealth	59	61	57	62	57	39	43	34	27	43	44	41	26	31	34	53	48	60	53	52	20	19	20	19	20	55	57	53	61	49	40	43	37	43	37		
The European Union (EU)						37	44	31	40	36	25	27	22	23	28	10	16	7								65	68	63	69	62	27	31	23	26	28		
Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN)	40	45	34	41	39	33	40	26	23	37																63	63	64	64	63	39	45	34	42	36		
The Group of Twenty (G20)	61	66	56	55	64	19	25	12	8	23																											
Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC)																																					
The African Union (AU)																																					
Caribbean Community (CARICOM)	36	41	30	22	42																																
Organisation of American States (OAS)																																					
South Pacific Forum																																					
The Group of 77 (G77)																																					
Organisation of Islamic Conference																																					
None of these	5	7	4	5	6	6	6	5	9	4	13	11	15	11	14	3	5	1	3	4	1	1	0	0	1	4	5	3	5	3	4	4	4	3	5		
Don't know	11	5	16	12	10	13	5	22	18	11	17	9	24	23	15	3	3	3	3	4	9	3	12	5	12	9	5	12	6	11	9	6	12	9	9		
Which ONE of the following is the MOST important to [your country]?																																					
Europe	3	4	2	3	3	8	7	9	9	7	36	42	30	34	37	42	47	33	34	49	50	58	45	55	45	27	28	27	32	24	42	47	37	29	55		
The Commonwealth	22	18	27	29	19	15	13	17	17	14	14	12	15	13	14	39	33	47	43	35	24	25	24	28	22	33	24	41	39	27	36	36	36	35	37		
America	25	25	25	19	27	63	74	53	54	67	32	34	29	33	31	32	37	25	27	38	42	42	42	36	47	19	22	16	12	25	25	23	27	20	30		
Pacific																																					
Asia	43	50	35	40	44																																
South Asia																																					
South East Asia																																					
Africa																																					
Caribbean																																					
Don't know	8	4	11	9	7	14	6	21	20	12	19	11	26	20	18	3	1	5	3	2	31	31	31	34	29	6	3	10	7	6	8	7	10	8	8		
The Commonwealth Secretary-General, who leads the Commonwealth Secretariat, is currently Kamalesh Sharma. Which ONE of the following do you think is currently head of the Commonwealth overall?																																					
The Queen	84	88	81	76	89	61	69	53	46	67	70	77	64	57	75	42	47	33	34	49	50	58	45	55	45	27	28	27	32	24	42	47	37	29	55		
Kofi Annan	2	1	2	1	2	3	2	2	2	6	5	7	6	10	9	11	9	10	1	1	2	1	1	2	1	7	6	8	6	7	13	13	14	17	10		
Gordon Brown	1	1	1	2	1	3	3	3	4	3	1	1	1	1	1	7	7	7	5	9	1	2	0	1	0	3	3	2	2	3	7	8	6	8	5		
President Obama	1	1	1	2	1	2	1	3	3	1	1	1	2	3	0	9	7	11	12	5	25	19	28	18	31	11	10	12	10	11	3	3	3	4			
Nelson Mandela	1	0	1	1	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	4	4	4	5	2	4	4	4	3	5	6	6	6	5	7	2	2	2	3	1		
Bill Gates	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	2	0	1	1	1	1	0	2	2	2	1	1	0	1	0	1	0		
Prince Charles	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	2	0	1	2	1	0	2	0	0	1	0	0	7	9	5	4	9	0	0	1	0			
Archbishop Desmond Tutu	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	1	0	1	0	1	1	0	1	1	0	1	0	1	2	1	2	1	0	2	1	2	2	3	4	0	1	1		
Bono	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	1	1	1	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	1	0			
Don't know	10	7	14	18	7	30	22	38	42	25	21	15	26	30	17	25	20	31	30	19	17	13	19	19	15	37	38	36	38	36	29	24	34	33	25		
Can you think of any activities that are undertaken by the Commonwealth?																																					
YES, See verbatim	37	40	33	36	37	23	25	20	19	24	22	30	14	21	22	47	48	45	46	49	26	32	23	23	29	48	51	46	58	39	34	39	30	31	37		
No, I cannot	37	36	38	29	36	52	51	52	60	48	49	43	55	57	46	23	22	25	23	24	68	63	70	74	63	34	22	14	16	20	35	33	36	34	35		
Not sure	27	24	29	25	27	27	24	29	21	29	29	27	31	22	32	30	29	30	32	27	6	5	7	4	8	18	27	41	26	41	32	29	34	35	29		
Percentage of 'Yes' listing Games or Sports	62					53					55					42					40					79											

ANNEX 2: ONLINE DISCUSSION GROUP EDITED REPORT



the qualitative edge

Royal Commonwealth Society
The Commonwealth Conversation: Edited Online Bulletin Board Findings
23 October 2009
Lucie Wernike

1. SUMMARY

1.1 Overall Impact of this Exercise

The exercise proved to be extremely valuable in engaging students and most were keen to express themselves fully. Many said at the end that they would very much like to remain in touch with the RCS. More specifically, students indicated that the exercise:

- Raised their awareness of the Commonwealth (and its activities) considerably
- Significantly improved their attitudes towards it
 - Simply asking people's (especially young people's) opinions was thought to show integrity and foresight
 - Better understanding of its activities and aims improves attitudes
- Encouraged them to get more involved and continue debating similar ideas
- Fuelled their understanding of other cultures and issues (within the Commonwealth)
- Fostered a spirit of community and camaraderie.

Many students suggested that an online bulletin board of this nature would be an ideal channel of communication for the future and seemed to feel comfortable interacting with one another within it.

- Ø 'I've realised that people that do this survey get more interested about the Commonwealth and what they are really about' (Trinidad)
- Ø 'It has made me see that there is more to it than just the British Empire and the Commonwealth Games' (UK)
- Ø 'I did not know that the Commonwealth did so much and wanted to do so much more! I thought it was more of a symbolic organisation as opposed to an organisation that actually makes a difference to the lives of people' (India)

1.2 National and Regional Differences?

Overall, responses from across the countries were similar, particularly when it came to students' prompted reactions to the Commonwealth and their needs and recommendations for it going forward. Some subtle differences emerged however between countries, upon occasion, and these are brought out within this report.

- Ø 'When I think about the so-called 'issues' that people in my community are dealing with and compare them with those of your community (to a Trinidadian), I am ashamed. I hope that our generation will see change on a global level, and that everyone will have the basic right to health care, proper nutrition and security' (Canada)

Students called for an organisation such as the Commonwealth to be mindful of these subtleties and national needs, without losing sight of their global remit, when considering its future role.

2. MAIN FINDINGS

2.1 Perceptions of the World

One of the most prominent insights gleaned from the discussion was students' belief that the rapid globalisation of the world rendered the notion of individual nation-states outdated and unhelpful. As factors such as technological access and increased migration (noticed by Australia and New Zealand specifically) fuel interaction between countries, and as the many serious global challenges we face rise in urgency, students believe that the need to act globally is increasingly pressing. They called (almost desperately) for their countries to look outwards, put aside their differences, accept where they'd been going wrong in the past and move forward together. Students' most immediate sense was that this change would need to come firstly from their leaders, although a small number of students spontaneously cited global organisations as a possible mechanism for doing this as well / instead.

- Ø 'Globally the world is faced with the credit crunch menace, bringing about financial constraints, low job opportunities for the youth and graduates after school, nations dominating over other nations' (Ghana)
- Ø 'In general the patriotic concept of distinct nations seems counter-productive. The world is more connected than ever and now works more as one integrated network...Issues such as global warming, famine and resource management must be addressed by the world as a whole and not separated into discrete territories' (New Zealand)

The Commonwealth has the potential to operate in this global remit and utilise students' frustration at the inward-focused-ness of their leaders.

Another significant insight from this discussion was the frustration that many students feel at being unheard and left out of the decision-making which affects them. Many talked about a strong divide between themselves and their leaders, resulting in outright disrespect towards authority in some countries (including Ghana, Cyprus and Trinidad) to more subdued apathy in others (including the UK and Canada). Most students indicated a strong self-belief, believing that they were the 'future' and as such, their opinions and influence should be sought.

- Ø 'The youth do not partake in decision making in the country because the Government do not deem it necessary to consult the youth' (Ghana)

Students want to be heard and get involved and feel they have a right to this, but haven't to date had the opportunity to do so.

Additionally, the power of the media emerged within the discussions. Some students, particularly those from Canada and the UK, spoke about the bias of the media and its detrimental effect on their 'real' knowledge levels (in other words, they were complaining that it was difficult to fully understand issues when the media was having such an influence on reporting to them). Nevertheless, many students also articulated their opinion that the Commonwealth needs to embrace the media to ensure its success, and that its lack of presence within it to date was having a significant influence over negative/ambivalent perceptions about it.

- Ø 'I think the greatest challenge we face is the effect of media in concentrating on the more material aspects of culture. Also, in terms of politics there is often a gross misrepresentation of stories by the media...I am very concerned about this; I think we need to disregard a lot of this and make the effort to become informed individuals.' (Canada)
- Ø 'I have never seen a news story regarding a Commonwealth decision in the news' (Canada)

2.2 Pertinent Issues

Students were asked what their most pressing personal, community/national and global issues were and what they felt could and should be done about them. Whilst there were many personal concerns expressed, frequently relating to both their lives now as well as their futures, they were arguably more vociferous and concerned about the wider issues (particularly amongst some of those in Ghana, Trinidad, India and Cyprus). Overall, students suggested that they felt they faced a world in which problems were becoming worse and solutions to them not forthcoming or influential.

The evidence of something or someone breaking out of this mould and offering more viable solutions to these issues would resonate with students considerably.

In more detail, students were also keen to discuss the numerous global issues that they felt we all faced, including;

- **Environment:** students talked animatedly about changing climate, reduction in the availability of natural resources, rising sea levels, the rising scarcity of water and so forth, and how existing activities to deal with these sorts of threats weren't sufficiently effective. Some students in countries such as Canada and New Zealand also spoke about the difficulty their countries faced trying to manage these issues whilst at the same time developing their economies (particularly in light of the recession). Students felt extremely strongly about environmental concerns and some cited their perception of a rising number of natural disasters as evidence of this.
- **The Economy:** Most students talked about this although those from countries such as Canada, UK and Australia talked about it more specifically than others. Students spoke about the personal hardships that were occurring now, and were likely to occur, because of this, as well as their fears about leaders failing to learn from it and creating an even worse financial situation in the future.
- **Human Rights:** This wasn't mentioned spontaneously by the majority of students but those who did talk about it (particularly those in Cyprus and Canada) seemed very concerned about it. More specifically, concerns were expressed about lack of voting abilities and the suppression of women in certain countries.
- **Terrorism and Foreign Invasions:** Students tended to talk less about this than other issues. Those who were most concerned were students from the UK and Canada, particularly focusing on the costs involved in defending these. Students in Sri Lanka also spoke about the threat of terrorism to their country specifically.

On a more community/national level, students from many countries (but especially Canada, Trinidad and Ghana) shared concerns about growing levels of unemployment, crime and homelessness, particularly those involving young people.

Indian, Ghanaian, and Trinidadian students also spoke about their country's lack of basic amenities (including effective health provision, sanitation and roads) as well as a lack of education for many, whilst others (especially in Trinidad) spoke of a decline in their country's moral values. Some students in India talked specifically about the economic threat that China posed to their country, about the significant gap between rich and poor within India, and about the strong threat of rising sea levels to their entire country's survival. Some students in Ghana talked about the too-strong a dependency of Ghana on overseas investment and aid.

Many also repeated their dissatisfaction with the political leadership in their countries. Students in the UK and Canada spoke about a general alienation and apathy towards leaders whom they felt failed to represent their peoples' needs.

Those in Cyprus, Ghana and Trinidad spoke more strongly about their Government's corruption, futility in dealing with crime, and the alienation of their leaders and public servants from the population.

The most pressing and concerning personal issue facing most students was the pressures that their studies placed upon them financially and academically. Some in countries such as Australia and Canada spoke about the need of many students to take on paid-work to supplement their incomes, resulting in less time available to study. Others (particularly in those same countries) also talked about the increased competitiveness to secure the best possible

grades, in response to a fear of fewer jobs being available after graduation. Students in countries such as Ghana, Trinidad, India and Sri Lanka spoke less about their fear of not accessing a suitable job and more about simply feeling the pressure (and actual need) to get through their courses successfully.

Some students (especially in Australia and Canada) also talked about the related concern of high living costs in their locales, not just as students (although the cost of being a student was a strong concern for many, again particularly in Australia), but once they were in the job-market as well.

Some students, particularly in Canada and the UK, also spoke about their dissatisfaction about theirs and their generation's self-absorption and narrow outlook on the world. This is in conflict a little with their perceptions of an increasingly globalised world, but is worth noting nevertheless, specifically because it'd need to be overcome if an organisation such as the Commonwealth were to try and engage them more. A more positive take on this, however, is that their awareness of their perceived self-absorption means that at least they have the potential to break out of it! Some students also spoke about the more typical student issues of peer pressure, relationships, drugs and so on, but appeared to put these lower down in their priorities than other things.

2.3 Spontaneous Suggestions for Dealing with These Issues

Overall, students indicated that the best ways that some of these issues might be addressed is through an integrated and joint effort made by international organisations (spontaneous mentions include the United Nations and European Union, depending on where the student lives), each country's Government and by individuals themselves. The idea behind this was that a joint, coordinated effort would be likely to yield incrementally stronger results than individual/isolated attempts, and that a joint effort would help ensure that everyone would be forced to take their responsibility.

Some of the spontaneous suggestions made by students as to how we could deal with these issues don't necessarily give the 'how tos' and simply refer to an issue that they'd like to see dealt with. Other suggestions, however, are more specific and directed. Irrespective of how thought-out they are, the suggestions indicate what's most important to students and provide stimulus for the Commonwealth's consideration. Examples include;

- Increasing funding and subsidies for better and wider education (the majority of students thought that this should be a top priority for the Commonwealth when prompted on this later)
 - Increasing funding and efforts into scientific research which will help develop 'greener' ways of using/managing our environment (for example, researching alternative fuel supplies, better waste disposal and water desalination options). These suggestions were made from students from a number of countries including Ghana, Canada and Australia. Focus on scientific research to aid the world's diseases was a stronger suggestion amongst students from Ghana and Trinidad.
 - Opening up communication channels to allow the people of the world to talk to each other, and giving these people more power in affecting change. Many students were desperate to get involved and bitterly frustrated with their Government's unwillingness to allow them this. They also believed that an opening up of communication would educate people about different cultures and perspectives, resulting in a more solutions-orientated global effort rather than a protectionist one. Please note that some students pinpointed this type of bulletin board as an ideal mechanism for discussion.
 - Some students, particularly those in Canada and the UK, suggested that another solution to these sorts of issues would be for tighter financial regulation of each country's financial centres (highlighting the prominence of the recession in the minds of these students)
 - Other students called for the immediate end of their Government's corruption as a way of effectively dealing with some of the problems that they faced
 - Encouraging each person to play their part in dealing with these issues by means of an effective communication strategy (possibility incentivised?).
- Ø 'We need to be able to communicate with our authorities, to let them know how we feel, and to see things get done!' (Cyprus)
- Ø 'I personally would love for a server such as what we are using now, to be implemented for general communication and networking. Something more advanced and mature than Facebook, hi5 and MSN Messenger etc.' (Trinidad)

2.4 Awareness and understanding of International Organisations

Overall, students said that they found it relatively difficult to say all that much about the organisations that we presented to them although most were able to say something about every one (with the possible exception of CARICOM), even if it just involved the area in which the organisation operated. Students tended to have more to say about the United Nations, the European Union, the G8 and the G20 than the others.

Many felt ashamed to admit their ignorance about these organisations overall and suggested a desire to learn some more.

Ø 'I'm embarrassed that I'm not more knowledgeable about these organisations – it's pretty shameful' (Canada)

The general sense about these organisations was that they were usually focused on a specific activity(ies) and were delivering on these to varying levels of success, but that many of them also operated with a degree of pomp, 'unnecessary busy-ness' and a silo, individualist approach, which were all thought to sometimes get in the way of their principle objectives.

An organisation which avoided outward displays of pomp, such as hosting lavish conventions and parties, and one which worked with, rather than alone or in conflict with others, would therefore be positively differentiated in students' minds.

Ø 'International organisations need to be better operated and friendly. People need to talk. People need to compromise. The rich need to calm down a bit and give the rest a fair go at making a life for themselves. The governments have to support this, stopping short of communism of course' (Cyprus)

More specifically, spontaneous perceptions of these organisations were as follows;

United Nations	Strongest support from students in the UK, Canada and Australia. Weakest support amongst students in Cyprus. Support focused on its mediation role, response to war crimes and provision of troops. Criticisms focused on its perceived ineffectiveness. Understanding amongst most students is that it includes several countries as well as some of its history (derived from League of Nations) 'The UN is about human rights...I think this union is a very good idea because if they were not in place the slavery would still be prevalent and women wouldn't be treated fairly' (Trinidad) 'The UN in theory is a wonderful institution but in reality is absolutely useless' (Cyprus)
European Union	Most consistently supported organisation (relative the others the students were discussing). Most strongly supported by Cyprus who believe it has helped them significantly (economically). Most believe it's quite stable (unchanging) and that its benefits to smaller countries are of merit. Believed to be primarily a trade/economic organisation which allows free trade amongst its members 'The EU is a god send. So far it has prevented war internally amongst the members and economically we are better. Places like Cyprus, Eastern Europe and aspiring nations have really advanced as a result. It is like a game. If you want in, you have to tick all the boxes. This is good for the planet, as it seems it is very liberal, yet at the same time very fair and structured!' (Cyprus)
G8	Most strongly criticised amongst the majority of students for its perceived greed and inward-focus (for richest 8 countries only). Some connection made with London terrorist attack (7/7) and awareness of protests surrounding it. Believed to be an organisation focused on trade, designed to benefit its members (only). 'They are very powerful and they control the economy of the world' (Ghana)
G20	Similar disdain to G8 but on a lesser scale, given students' general awareness (particularly within countries such as Canada and the UK) of its inclusion of emerging economies as well (including the BRICs).
African Union	Many students hadn't heard of this but assumed it was similar to the more well-known Arab Union and was designed to promote trade and harmony within Africa. Some students failed to understand how it could work given their perception of significant tribal warfare in the region. Many others, however, were pleased to hear about it because it suggested giving the generally 'down-trodden' African states a chance at competing globally.

	'I was not aware of this. That is great to hear, if it is true. It's about time they started to propel forward and be a competitor of the rich west' (Cyprus)
CARICOM	Very few students, with the exception of those in Trinidad had heard of this. Trinidadians tended to be positive about its economic benefits

2.5 Unprompted awareness and understanding of the Commonwealth

Immediate Thoughts

Most students felt that they didn't know very much at all about the Commonwealth and had very little affiliation with it, although many felt guilty about their lack of knowledge.

Most frequent immediate associations were directed at its history, about which students tended to know a few basic facts, in addition to the Commonwealth Games

Ø 'It hard to care about something you don't know about' (Canada)

More specifically, most students' spontaneous comments about the Commonwealth were that it comprised former colonies (no mention was made of non-colonies now being included). A few students (less than half but more than a handful) also spontaneously said that they were (therefore) aware that its members were all democracies and shared a common system of law. Some also suggested that it was an apolitical organisation, and quite a few immediately spoke of the Commonwealth Games (although not everyone mentioned this by name; some simply spoke of 'great sporting events').

Ø 'Countries with a history tied to the British Empire. I think they do nothing these days other than hosting some games every 4 years' (New Zealand)

Perhaps in response to this lack of knowledge, students were also keen to express an opinion about the Commonwealth quite quickly.

Immediate opinions tended to focus on it being outdated, non-active and lacking in influence and presence (particularly in the media).

Most students said that they had learnt about it in school but in a dry, non-inspiring way, and that they hadn't heard much about it since.

Ø 'I've not seen or heard anything reported in the news about the Commonwealth in a very long time. It doesn't seem very active to me' (New Zealand)

Ø 'The Commonwealth is a platform for fancy parties and the Commonwealth Games, where little countries like Cyprus actually win medals. In all seriousness though, the Commonwealth needs to get its act together and get stronger, or disband' (Cyprus)

Ø 'They are not well known, they do very little for their members and do not promote their interest so well. They should be more vibrant' (Ghana)

The exceptions to this negative opinion were from a few students who'd, by chance, come across it personally. One student in Ghana and one in Canada had benefitted from educational grants and exchange programmes, whilst another in Trinidad had come across it through the Commonwealth Forum in his country. An Indian and a Sri Lankan student also spoke about their awareness of the good that the Commonwealth had done in disaster relief.

Ø 'I've only lately been informed of who the Commonwealth is because Trinidad is the host, and I applied to participate' (Trinidad)

Ø 'Through the Commonwealth Ghana can get financial assistance to help it to develop, security assistance in times of civil war, free trade, and it brings unity among member states' (Ghana)

Ø 'They play cricket, hold a mini-Olympics every 4 years, slap each other on the back for the Queens visits, and stick their nose out at Zimbabwe. Apart from that, the impression I have of them in Cyprus is that they are an

invisible group of ex-colonised countries that were ripped apart by the British, and the Commonwealth 'club' is an informal way to apologise. I see no value personally in it, but I believe it has STRONG potential. Hopefully it will get its act together' (Cyprus)

What was noticeable, however, was that as the discussion developed, students' interest in the Commonwealth visibly peaked.

Directed Considerations

Students were then asked what they thought the Commonwealth did and what its strengths and weaknesses were. Despite reminding students to answer this without researching it first, it was obvious that some students did (possibly reflecting their discomfort at not knowing what to say). The responses are summarised here from those who didn't appear to research their answers first.

Answers given about what the Commonwealth did were frequently broad and unspecific; whilst they weren't necessarily incorrect (although some were), many of them nevertheless indicated a lack of firm understanding.

- Ø 'Equal rights to all countries who have joined the group' (Sri Lanka)
- Ø 'I think that the fundamental goal of this agency is to promote World Peace. I believe that the Commonwealth has some sort of tie with Britain' (Canada)
- Ø 'I think its role is limited, there are certain trade agreements between the countries' (UK)

When asked to think about the Commonwealth's strengths, some students focused (once again) on generic benefits; those which are likely to apply to any international organisation which is inherently 'good,' namely, being a vehicle for implementing change, improvements and progress.

Other strengths focused on the Commonwealth's values, namely creating an equal 'playing field' for all members, promoting peace and democracy, helping those in need and protecting and fuelling members' economies.

- Ø 'That its core values and goals are peaceful in nature; centring on world peace and democracy' (Canada)

A few students also spoke about the more specific Commonwealth Games as an additional strength.

- Ø 'The Commonwealth Games every 4 years....Apart from that, I do not sense their presence at all on this planet' (Cyprus)

When asked about its weaknesses, by far the most common one was its lack of presence and the fact that its members weren't aware of what it did.

Following on from that, many students suggested that it probably lacked the strength (financially, politically) to achieve its goals. Some students also suggested that its limit as to who was allowed in to it was an inherent weakness. One student incorrectly believed that a weakness of it was that it included economically-powerful countries only.

- Ø 'They are not well known, they do very little for their members and do not promote their interest so well. They should be more vibrant' (Ghana)
- Ø 'Lack of information, publicity and education to the members' (Cyprus)
- Ø 'Perhaps that it doesn't include more countries' (Canada)

Assumptions about what others in their countries felt about the Commonwealth were revealing. Some students in Ghana, India, Canada and Trinidad thought that their populations would be quite warm towards it, either because of historical ties (Canadians were thought to have always had a close relationship with Britain, and might therefore feel closely aligned to the Commonwealth), or because of specific assistance that the Commonwealth had provided to these countries.

- Ø 'It is very popular in Ghana and it has helped the country by giving grants and loans to help eliminate poverty. We see it as a good way to help in free trade and globalise' (Ghana)
- Ø 'I think Indians are quite happy with the current situation in the Commonwealth. It means we can keep in touch with our British influences to the extent we want to' (India)
- Ø 'The Commonwealth is very important to my country; partially because of its role in helping the world, which indirectly helps out Canada as well' (Canada)

Those in other countries tended to suggest that others would be ambivalent.

A small number (including a few in Australia and the UK) wondered whether some of their population might also be a little against it (for example, as a hindrance to Australia becoming a republic, or amongst French Canadians who would be reminded of deeply contested former colonisation).

- Ø 'In New Zealand the Commonwealth is seen ambivalently. It promotes important values but seems outdated' (New Zealand)
- Ø 'I'd imagine that some are proud of it as a hark back to past 'glories,' some are ashamed for the same reasons' (UK)

Quiz Responses

Answers given to the prompted multiple choice questions asked about the Commonwealth in the quiz revealed a high level of awareness that The Queen was its head and that its Secretariat was in London, and a reasonably high awareness of the number of countries within it. Many (but not all) students were aware that India, South Africa, Australia, Kenya and Jamaica were members, but there was much lower awareness of other countries' involvement. When asked to list their unprompted awareness of the types of activity that the Commonwealth gets involved with, the most frequent mentions were about sports and trade. There weren't any spontaneous mentions of youth assistance or human rights, both of which were cited previously as being extremely important to students!

2.6 Prompted attitudes towards The Commonwealth

Response to the information provided on the whiteboard and the Commonwealth website was generally extremely positive.

Most students strongly appreciated being informed about its work and felt warm towards an organisation which was helping their own countries and/or others (students in Ghana, India and Sri Lanka in particular were more likely to feel direct benefit from the Commonwealth than some of the others such as those in New Zealand and Canada).

There were a couple of less-positive comments, however, which should be borne in mind. These came from students who either felt that the Commonwealth was too outdated in its aims and structure, mainly because of the lack of obvious connections between its members today (i.e. no obvious or geographical connections), or because they couldn't get over the fact that they weren't aware of it achieving any of these goals. For full acceptance and support, students require the Commonwealth to demonstrate its achievements.

Overall, however, students were delighted to learn about the Commonwealth's breadth of activity, its reach, and its principle focus on making the world (overall) a better place.

Most students feel almost desperate for an international organisation to foster global partnerships and solutions, for the collective good, and once prompted on the Commonwealth's activities, believe that it has the potential to fulfil this role.

Many are also very keen on the idea of an organisation helping the less developed/weaker countries; this meets their moral desire for fairness as well as their understanding that helping others is likely to help everyone in the long term (through improved economies and opportunities, and reduced frustrations and tension).

Many students also felt that the relevance of the sorts of issues that the Commonwealth focuses on (e.g. AIDS/HIV) was an additional strength of it. A small number of students (Ghana) also focused on the benefits of having an organisation which reminds people of its history so that it can help foster good relations in the future and prevent future disharmony.

- Ø 'I am glad Australia is part of the Commonwealth and I believe that it is important that such an alliance of such a large number of democratic nations is present, as I am a firm believer in democracy and believe countries must collaborate and work together to move forward and address global issues effectively' (Australia)
- Ø 'It appears that the Commonwealth is a highly important organization for millions of people in terms of its development and educational work' (UK)
- Ø 'Having looked at the website I have realized that the Commonwealth is more important and beneficial to my country than I at first thought' (UK)

Interestingly, the prompting of students about the Commonwealth reminded one or two about facts that they'd already known, or experiences that they'd already had with it (such as a Canadian remembering that a native film producer had been helped by the Commonwealth to promote his film about climate change). People seem to build up an opinion and understanding about something when they're exposed to it over time; without this exposure, their perceptions quickly wane.

Responses to the White Board

Whiteboards, with information about the Commonwealth, were used to gauge students' perceptions of the Commonwealth's strengths, weaknesses and emerging questions, and to allow them to pose questions. The whiteboard exercise confirmed that;

Students value:

- The Commonwealth's diversity (types of country)
- The fact that its membership comprises of a large proportion of young people
- The fact that countries can choose to join
- The fact that members work together
- The fact that the Commonwealth works on valuable and contemporary issues such as generating social and economic opportunities, HIV/AIDS and climate change
- The fact that it's run by a rotating group of leaders.

Students are less keen on the idea of:

- Expulsion of wrong-doing countries: many can't see the point and question whether it's a sufficient deterrent
- A few question the value and fairness of having the Queen as its head.

Highlighted areas below are those that were most typically noted as strengths, dislikes and questions by students;

Prompted Strengths

The Commonwealth is a vibrant and growing voluntary association of states (currently 53)
The world's largest and smallest, richest and poorest countries make up the Commonwealth and it's home to two billion people of all faiths and ethnicities – over half of whom are 25 or under.
The birth of the modern Commonwealth, as we recognise it today, really began with the independence of India and Pakistan from Britain in 1947. It then became the natural choice for many new nations emerging out of decolonisation in the 1950s and 1960s. Member states support and work together towards shared goals of democracy, freedom, peace, the rule of law and environmental, social and economic opportunity for all.
Practically, its work is diverse, including helping trade negotiations, building the small business sector, encouraging women entrepreneurs, supporting the quality and quantity of teachers, and increasing understanding of HIV/AIDS.
It has helped play a leading role in decolonisation, combating racism, and advancing sustainable development in poor countries.
The Commonwealth Games Federation works to organise the 4-yearly Commonwealth Games
Member countries and organisations have also built alliances outside the Commonwealth. For example, Commonwealth ideas have been taken up by the World Health Organization on the migration of doctors and nurses and by the International Labour Organization on the migration of teachers.
Its values are protected by a rotating group of nine Foreign Ministers who have the authority to suspend or even recommend expulsion if a country isn't keeping the Commonwealth's principles.
Heads of Government and ministers meet regularly to ensure that Commonwealth policies and programmes represent views of its members
Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II is Head of the Commonwealth and Kamallesh Sharma is its Secretary-General
This year sees the Commonwealth celebrating its 60th anniversary. Mindful of its history, yet focused on the present day and the future, the Commonwealth looks set to become increasingly relevant in a world of uncertain international relations, of climate change, and of conflict and continuing poverty, where the need for global co-operation and mutual understanding has never been greater.

- Ø 'All the countries behave like siblings, trying to help each other out' (Ghana)
- Ø 'I am happy that they're focusing on poverty because it's about time it stops' (Trinidad)
- Ø 'At least it is diverse' (New Zealand)
- Ø '(Member states supporting each other) is good because no small nation can stand alone' (Trinidad)
- Ø 'I like how more than half the population in the Commonwealth is under 25 years. This allows for great changes to occur as the new generation takes over' (Canada)
- Ø 'It is good that the Commonwealth is increasing its understanding of HIV and AIDS which is killing a lot of people' (Ghana)
- Ø 'I had no idea that this was the case. I simply thought that the Commonwealth represented a sort of politically correct and modern incarnation of the British Empire. That it is a matter of choice for member states to join is a matter of importance' (UK)
- Ø 'I believe that this (social and economic opportunity) is a great aim to be working towards' (India)

Prompted Dislikes

The Commonwealth is a vibrant and growing voluntary association of states (currently 53)
The world's largest and smallest, richest and poorest countries make up the Commonwealth and it's home to two billion people of all faiths and ethnicities – over half of whom are 25 or under.
The birth of the modern Commonwealth, as we recognise it today, really began with the independence of India and Pakistan from Britain in 1947. It then became the natural choice for many new nations emerging out of decolonisation in the 1950s and 1960s.
Member states support and work together towards shared goals of democracy, freedom, peace, the rule of law and environmental, social and economic opportunity for all.
Practically, its work is diverse, including helping trade negotiations, building the small business sector, encouraging women entrepreneurs, supporting the quality and quantity of teachers, and increasing understanding of HIV/AIDS.
It has helped play a leading role in decolonisation, combating racism, and advancing sustainable development in poor countries.
The Commonwealth Games Federation works to organise the 4-yearly Commonwealth Games
Member countries and organisations have also built alliances outside the Commonwealth. For example, Commonwealth ideas have been taken up by the World Health Organization on the migration of doctors and nurses and by the International Labour Organization on the migration of teachers.
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- Ø Why should the Queen be Head of the Commonwealth – I should think that society was past the ancient practice of loyalty' (New Zealand)
- Ø 'There should be different heads of state being one head' (Trinidad)
- Ø 'Is this enough of a deterrent for members to uphold the Commonwealth's principles?' (India)

Emerging Questions

The Commonwealth is a vibrant and growing voluntary association of states (currently 53). The world's largest and smallest, richest and poorest countries make up the Commonwealth and it's home to two billion people of all faiths and ethnicities – over half of whom are 25 or under.

The birth of the modern Commonwealth, as we recognise it today, really began with the independence of India and Pakistan from Britain in 1947. It then became the natural choice for many new nations emerging out of decolonisation in the 1950s and 1960s. Member states support and work together towards shared goals of democracy, freedom, peace, the rule of law and environmental, social and economic opportunity for all.

Practically, its work is diverse, including helping trade negotiations, building the small business sector, encouraging women entrepreneurs, supporting the quality and quantity of teachers, and increasing understanding of HIV/AIDS. It has helped play a leading role in decolonisation, combating racism, and advancing sustainable development in poor countries.

The Commonwealth Games Federation works to organise the 4-yearly Commonwealth Games. Member countries and organisations have also built alliances outside the Commonwealth. For example, Commonwealth ideas have been taken up by the World Health Organization on the migration of doctors and nurses and by the International Labour Organization on the migration of teachers.

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- Ø 'How is it vibrant? Nothing is ever heard about it!' (New Zealand)
- Ø 'I don't really know how much the Commonwealth countries have helped each other develop' (Canada)
- Ø 'If this is what the Commonwealth is trying to do, why do the Commonwealth countries not seem to advertise this to their citizens? It seems that lots of citizens of Commonwealth countries on this board don't even know what it does or anything else' (Canada)
- Ø 'I'm not sure, what is decolonization? I think it's something about being under the British rule' (Trinidad)
- Ø 'What are the consequences of expulsion?' (New Zealand)

2.7 Spontaneous and prompted ideas for the Commonwealth going forward

Students spent the final day of the discussions debating ideas for the Commonwealth's future. Discussions comprised of spontaneous thoughts as well as those prompted by a list of possible remits for the Commonwealth to focus on and some sound clips of interviews with leaders describing their own visions for the Commonwealth's future.

Overall, students are highly ambitious for the Commonwealth's future and want to see it present itself prominently and boldly.

They believe that it has the potential to differentiate itself from other international organizations, and that it was imperative that it did so; any whiff of it being 'just another organisation' would turn students off from it immediately.

- Ø 'I'd go about making it the most important and influential international body out there' (New Zealand)
- Ø 'It sounds similar to the UN. What is the difference? Which is better? What actions could the Commonwealth do with the UN that would be better than either one doing so alone?' (Canada)

Students suggested that the Commonwealth required two 'hats;' one which faced outwards to the global market, promoting itself, working on global issues, and generally having a large world presence. The other was to focus more specifically on the distinct and unique needs of each member state, working on the ground to deliver effective solutions. Both of these roles were thought to be equally important.

More specifically, students indicated that the Commonwealth should consider the following:

Review remit and brand

Students believe that an important first step for the Commonwealth is to make sure that it knows what it's about and the way it would like to come across.

Many students felt that members' historical ties were no longer sufficient to be the fundamental premise of the organization and that it needed to create an identity founded on something additional to this, and something more relevant to today's world.

- Ø 'A committee should be set up to review the activities of the Commonwealth to the ordinary citizen, after the review the committee should draw up strategic plans for the Commonwealth in the years ahead...Publicity of re-branding of the Commonwealth should take place to build the lost interest' (Ghana)
- Ø 'It's nice to see that the Commonwealth is actually interested to know about where it stands today. It's very important for any organisation to check on its shortcomings and work on them' (India)
- Ø 'I feel stronger after reflecting on it more that for the Commonwealth to be relevant they need to take bold actions that other nations will notice and can follow the lead on, they seem to be too similar to the United Nations at the moment. They need a distinct identity, and a purpose for existing as such a random association of nations' (Canada)

Students suggested that consulting with members would aid this thinking significantly, and that devising a strategy for the future shouldn't be done without this sort of consultation.

- Ø 'I would then try and organise an activity like this, but on a much larger scale to figure out what the members actually want from the Commonwealth' (India)

Suggestions made about what they felt the Commonwealth's remit and brand should be included;

- A moral organisation, designed to alleviate the world's ills, rather than an overtly economic or political one
 - A modern organisation, founded on historical ties but fuelled by a contemporary understanding of what is needed from it
 - A powerful and impactful organisation, with the ability to deliver on its remit and genuinely make a difference
 - A unique, different organisation, able to work alone or with others where appropriate; students were very keen for the Commonwealth to avoid being protectionist in its activities. The focus was to be on the goals set rather than on petty political rivalries
 - A brave, bold organisation, unafraid to shout about its efforts and fight for what it feels is right
 - An efficient, 'do-ing' sort of organisation, avoiding any displays of unnecessary pomp (fancy conferences etc)
 - And (as mentioned above), an outward and inward-facing organization, operating on both a global as well as a micro scale
 - An open organisation, willing to listen to its members, allow them to interact with one another, and get involved in its operations.
- Ø 'The idea of creating an 'Open Commonwealth Association' comes to mind; this association allows the public to make decisions small and large' (Trinidad)
 - Ø 'I would also develop a forum where people could directly communicate with the Commonwealth as I feel there is a perception that only countries can discuss issues with the Commonwealth' (India)

With regards to the sorts of issues that students felt the Commonwealth should focus on the most, the following list gives a sense of their order of priority (the top one being their most important);

- The Environment: many students believe that this is fundamental to the future and survival of our planet and as such, has to be the Commonwealth's top priority. Additionally, students expressed frustration at the poor attempts made by other organisations in dealing with the environment to date and were therefore desperate for some effective action to be taken. Expectations were that the Commonwealth would work on this remit globally

(campaigning, educating) as well as locally (aiding people to adopt more environmentally-friendly practices, helping fund local initiatives etc).

- Ø 'I sound like a broken record, but climate change is occurring so rapidly that I feel that it is of most relevance to today's world' (Canada)
- Education: students are extremely eager to see the Commonwealth play a significant role in this, particularly aiding younger children (especially girls) to access primary education, but also extending out to young adults having access to tertiary education. Many students would like to see education being offered in the form of exchange programmes within member countries, and certainly those students who had already benefited from these were extremely grateful for them. Students in countries such as Canada, UK and Australia were keen to see the Commonwealth focus its educational efforts on those countries which needed it the most, and believed that improved education globally would have a positive knock-on effect on everyone. Some students believed that improved education would also help with environmental issues because it would allow people to better understand what they needed to do to help in this. Please note that many students responded warmly to the idea of the Commonwealth having training 'academies' and think tanks on the ground to educate members about its work and encourage participation in it.
- Ø 'I would also continue and expand the educational initiatives in the poorer member countries' (UK)
- Ø 'You can give a man a fish, and he'll be full for the day. You can teach a man to fish, and he'll be full forever' (Canada)
- Ø 'I would inculcate new and cheaper, actually more affordable, education to the poor and especially to women' (India)
- Health: many students believed that this was an important remit for the Commonwealth, with particular focus on encouraging scientific development in preventative and curative medicines, as well as infrastructures for delivering healthcare
- Ø 'I'd surely build more healthcare centres with better technology for treatment' (India)
- Young people: as mentioned throughout this report, students strongly believe that their involvement in their countries is important and is presently so rarely offered. Students are keen to get involved and believe that they have the right to do this because they represent the future of their countries. Additionally, many students believe that young people are in need of Commonwealth assistance. It's important to remember what some of these students said about their contemporaries (non- students), i.e. that many faced a number of social issues and were frequently disaffected and alienated; the implementation of remits which are to focus on, and involve, young people needs to therefore be carefully managed. Additionally, some students suggested that young people tend to be more open-minded and willing to learn than older people.
- Ø 'How about young people...acting as ambassadors in their states for the Commonwealth?' (Cyprus)
- Ø 'Educating the young is easier than educating the old who are often stubborn and unwilling to change' (Canada)
- Ø 'The Commonwealth should focus on the young people since they are the future leaders and the future of the country depends on them' (Ghana)
- Employment: some students think that this is of importance, particularly given the existing economic climate facing member countries
- Ø 'Remember a hungry man is an angry man. When people have jobs to do they will not think of war' (Ghana)
- Human Rights, Science and Technology, Gender Equality, Promotion of Culture and Peace and Conflict were also mentioned by a few students as being important areas for the Commonwealth to focus on, but they were less frequently mentioned than the remits above.
- Ø 'Promotion of culture is something I feel strongly about, as I feel that much conflict is brought on because people do not take the time to understand the motivations of others and their cultural differences' (Canada)

- Ø 'Human rights can be promoted by economic sanctions etc on a state or body that breaches these rights. This is what the Commonwealth did with Zimbabwe. The punishment needs to be more severe however, to reduce the chances of breaches' (Cyprus)

Consider best ways to raise awareness and understanding

Once its brand and remit have been determined, students are adamant that the Commonwealth needs to promote itself significantly, given that its presence at the moment is thought to be non-existent.

- Ø 'First off, try to get people to know what the Commonwealth does. A little press here and there, maybe a couple of out of the box marketing ploys...would be helpful' (Canada)

There were a number of suggestions made as to how it could effectively, consistently and innovatively promote itself, including;

- Releasing press statements (for all sorts of media channels, including new media such as social networking sites) about what it has achieved and what it thinks about different issues
- Ø 'It can't be the usual type of marketing where you simply tell people, or an infomercial. Consumers/individuals are smart and bored easily. Educate consumers without having them feel they are being bored/bombarded by another UN.' (Canada)
- Ø 'If their actions are not noticeable enough to garner the attention of international media, perhaps they aren't doing enough or the right things' (Canada)
- Ensuring that the website is as up to date as possible and enables visitors to download parts of it easily
- Setting up a facility whereby an open dialogue between members and the Commonwealth is always possible. As mentioned previously, many students felt that a bulletin board of a similar nature to this piece of work, might be an appropriate mechanism for this
- Working with other international organizations to gain some joint promotion
- Ø 'The Commonwealth should represent the states in a unified voice in international institutions like the EU, UN, Red Cross etc' (Cyprus)
- Ø 'Using as many media outlets as possible. Is there a way to align with another organisation to be even more powerful in putting out its message?' (Canada)
- Trying to build relationships with key figureheads to encourage them to talk about the Commonwealth
- Setting up Commonwealth branded charities and relief foundations
- Having buildings within each country to help promote its work and encourage member interaction
- Using the Commonwealth Games as a vehicle for promotion of its other work.
- Ø 'During the Commonwealth Games massive education campaigns can take part, by advertising during commercial breaks, in the ceremonies etc. Parts of the ticket proceeds etc can be publicly donated to the charities established to help the Commonwealth's poorest states' (Cyprus)

Students were also keen to tell us the sorts of tone of voice that they'd hope the Commonwealth would adopt within their communications, namely something natural and modern rather than anything too formal or staged. Please note that one or two students felt that the sound clips presented to them during the bulletin board were too formal in their tone.

- Ø 'What a boring and useless piece. This has not enlightened me in any way. It sounds like fancy words, with no hard evidence etc as to what the Commonwealth does and can do. It is just talking! I cannot believe that this is real?! You have to talk with substance, not politician style answers' (Cyprus)

ANNEX 3: WINNING COMMONWEALTH CHAT REPORT

A Report Of The Commonwealth Chat Facilitated by: Kareem Folajaiye

Occupation: Student

Date:-29th, October 2009

Venue Social Sciences, Basement, Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile- Ife, Osun State, Nigeria.

Time: 4:30-6:15pm

Minutes by: Ogunfowoke Tunde

Agenda for the Commonwealth chat.

- 1 Introduction
- 2 Warm Up
- 3 What do you think about the commonwealth?
- 4 Commonwealth quiz
- 5 Finding out a bit more about the commonwealth
- 6 The Commonwealth's role and value
- 7 Refreshments
- 8 The benefits of membership
- 9 The future of the commonwealth- Your ideas and suggestions
- 10 What do you think about the commonwealth again? / Closing.

Attendance Information

I invited the students of my university to the chat through word of mouth (to intimate friends) and by invitation leaflets (to interested participants). I got down relevant information of the participants by making them fill a form before the programme commenced. The invitation was thrown out to involve more people so as to avoid low turn out if some of the invitees end up not showing up therefore, I expected more than 8 participants but prepared only for the first 8 attendees. On the long run, 12 participants showed up. These are the basic information of all the attendees:

Age group of all participants: (18-25)

Nationality of participants: Nigerian

What all participants do for a living: Study

Course of study of each participant: Psychology, Political science, Accounting, Medicine, Sociology, Geology, Microbiology, Law and Mechanical engineering.

Introduction

I introduced myself to the group and I went straight to introduce chat following the exact procedures of the discussion guide. We set ground rules and I urged the participants to sign the consent form.

Warm Up

At first we had an icebreaker called Totty Totty which was fun. I asserted that if we could laugh together then we could work together. I later split the participants into two groups to work on the "get to know each other" icebreaker. In return, every individual reported back the information they got from their partner. From the icebreaker, we discovered the participants had interest mostly in reading, music, sports, writing and gardening as part of their hobbies.

What the group thinks about the commonwealth

After I stated the objectives of this section, I asked them the questions in the discussion guide. Here is what I gathered from their thoughts in the discussion; Some of the members knew a little about the Commonwealth, more than half had some knowledge of the Commonwealth while only a few had picked interest in the Commonwealth as a result of their course of study. Those who had a little knowledge of the Commonwealth all said the first thing that came through their minds when they heard of the Commonwealth was 1. British colonies, 2. The queen of England who they think decides all the things that happen in the Commonwealth. The participant who claimed to have a standard knowledge of the Commonwealth said the Commonwealth is an international organization that has both British and non British countries as their

members but he immediately announced his dislike for the Commonwealth, its formation and principles. His view immediately made me ask about the groups overall impressions of the commonwealth. A participant who is a fresh student of Sociology stated that he thinks Nigeria's membership has brought about the growth of capitalism in the country which has been a negative impact to the nation. He stood his grounds as negative to the Commonwealth.

An Accounting student on the other hand declared his love for the Commonwealth because he believes Nigeria has gained a lot of economic assistance from the association.

The Mechanical Engineering student who admitted he did not know too much about the Commonwealth however believes that it is better for a country to be enveloped under an umbrella of countries than for it to stand alone and thus he supports the associations involvement of lots of countries.

One of the Political Science students believes that Nigeria benefits from the Commonwealth in terms of security since the association would want to defend its members in times of distress.

Another Political Science student individually concludes that he only enjoys the sporting benefits derived from the Commonwealth but disagrees with the Commonwealth's actions because he believes it has not met its aims and objectives over the years. He prefers to be against the Commonwealth rather than being neutral.

I moved on to ask how and where they got to know about the Commonwealth. Majority of the participants claimed they heard about the organization through their Secondary Schools. One participant said he was made to learn about the commonwealth and its benefits in his primary school through quiz competitions while another learnt of the association as part of his school curriculum and course of study. Majority of the group believe that the Commonwealth has not gained enough publicity, as they do not hear about it as often as they hear about other international organizations.

The Commonwealth Quiz

I divided the group into two equal groups and we made an icebreaker out of 5 questions from the discussion guide. The group that got most of the answers was rewarded with extra refreshments. Both groups did not know the number of countries and people in the commonwealth, the venue of next the commonwealth heads of government meeting. The group that named majority of the events undertaken by the Commonwealth won the quiz.

Finding out more about the commonwealth.

After the quiz, I explained the objective of the next item on the agenda to the group. Immediately I handed out copies of the maps and appendix two leaflets to each participant. I gave them time to read through and study the materials in their possession and then I asked them questions based on their reactions towards the new information they have just gotten. A few of the participants were surprised to know the Commonwealth had 53 member countries. A member in the group was happy to see that India and Malaysia are now considered fast growing industrializing nations. Another participant was pleased to see that the Commonwealth had a lot of programmes that encourage youth involvements. Majority of the participants were marvelled by the amount of small countries, the diversity and the percentage of the number of people that form the commonwealth.

The Commonwealth's role and value

I moved on to the roles and values of the commonwealth quickly as the group was beginning to take more time to study the materials I gave to them. In order to manage time, I quickly gave out copies of the appendix three leaflets and read the information to the group. After I stopped reading most of the members became itchy to ask questions. I urged them to give honest opinions about the information they have just acquired and relate it to what they have known before the chat.

When I asked if the information was surprising, the aspiring sociologist speaking with personal concerns referred to the portion in the appendix where it stated that all the commonwealth nations have equal voices and disagreed with the fact. He said the voice of small and underdeveloped countries do not count. His reasons being that, the backward growth of the economy of these nations shows they have little or no say in making major decisions for themselves in the international scene. He drew examples from the trade issues, the International monetary fund and the G5 countries. He said if the commonwealth has raising a common voice with their member countries as their goal, then it should have won some critical battles that has led to the crumbling of small countries by standing for them in one voice. One of the aspiring political science

students, who grew bitter, was moved to say that all they have read in the appendix three were either notes to paint the commonwealth white or visions the commonwealth have not been able to accomplish a huge part of. The sociologist went on to say the information on was an over-glorification of the Commonwealth and an expedient action to becloud partakers of the Commonwealth Conversation about the true happenings of the commonwealth.

The group all listened and drew reasons from what the two participants had said. Someone else then said it would have been preferable if they were provided with more information about the achievements and failings of the commonwealth so as to enable the group draw out true opinions on how to improve the Commonwealth. He said, the results of the declarations written in appendix three succeeded in telling them about the dreams of the Commonwealth was not close to achieving.

Some others were totally against the suspension of erring countries from the Commonwealth, because this country would lose the support it gets from the organization to solve the problems that caused the suspension in the first place.

When I asked if the information from appendix three fits with their impressions of the Commonwealth, those who had totally negative views about the association said, seeing that the information shows that the declarations are totally positive and equal, they have partially positively changed views about the association but they maintain their negative stance until they see a Commonwealth with perfect outcomes that match their visions.

When I asked what the group would do to help address these issues the main answer that was echoed was that the Commonwealth should judiciously follow up all they have set in their declarations by making the right decisions and policies made and sticking to them. They recommended that democratic principles and due process be followed to ensure true equity between all members. A member of the group also added that the Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group should have foreign ministers from all the countries that are strictly adhering to the values of the Commonwealth, rather than just nine foreign ministers whose criteria of selection is not made know to us.

The Strengths of the commonwealth according to the group are its:

- Sincere desire to promote unity amongst all members.
- Ability to monitor and take major actions on countries that violate the values of the association.
- The outstanding publicity of the Commonwealth Games and the beauty of its core values.
- Flexible policy that allows members to join the Commonwealth at free will and also bring small countries together to be heard as one voice.

The weaknesses of the commonwealth according to the group are its:

- Inability to promote the association's good aim to convince a major part of the industrialized part of the world to the Commonwealth leading to the increased dependency of the numerous small and underdeveloped nations on the very few developed and industrialized nations in the association.
- Low rates of scholarships offered considering the amount of those who would be empowered through it and the increasing amount of people who are stagnated as a result of lack of opportunity, bearing in mind that over half of the Commonwealth populations are youths to be empowered through the scheme.
- Inability to make more impacting decisions over issues with urgent attention from the international community. For instance, in the Niger delta crises in Nigeria, which they claimed that Nigerian never felt the impact of the Commonwealth concerning the issue especially at its peak period.
- Publicity and roles which are not yet know by known by a considerable amount of Commonwealth countries not to talk of the world at large.
- Weak efforts in combating global hunger which has been a rising threat to the globe.
- Weak efforts also in enlightening a large part of the world about the problems and solutions of the 21st century. An example being climate change.
- Poor implementation of its declarations and meeting verdicts, which in turn makes their actions not clear and tailored towards the achievement of the reason for its establishment.
- The future geologist in the group expressed his concern about laying too much responsibility for the Commonwealth stating that the association is restricted to carrying out some certain actions in comparison to the UN.
- While we struggled to end the previous topic and introduce the next topic, a participant asserted that he hated the fact that the Queen of England controlled the affairs of the Commonwealth and that she would remain as head throughout her reign. I had to explain to the group that the Queen stands mainly as a ceremonial head of the Commonwealth and that the main affairs of the Commonwealth are run by the

secretariat and all the member countries. I also told him that the position as head would not necessarily be passed through the British monarchs. I read through some information I got from the internet to the group so as to further the group's understanding of the history and system of administration of the Commonwealth.

Refreshments

Although we have slated this portion for refreshment, the group preferred to get through the chat first before the refreshment because they were so interested in the smooth flow of the chat. They also wanted to get through the chat faster because we spent more time covering lots of topics.

Benefits of the Commonwealth

I went on straight to read out the objectives of this next task to the group.

Majority of the group said they would be disappointed if Nigeria was suspended only because it would lower the country's international reputation. Some participants believe because the intentions of the declarations of the Commonwealth are perfectly just, it would be sad for the country to be suspended from a just cause.

A few participants said they would not really mind if Nigeria is suspended after all the country didn't feel the impact of its first suspension. A participant said he would be happy because the Nigerian government would transfer the funds budgeted for Commonwealth for other sectors more beneficial to the Nigerian economy.

Some participants felt the country would not feel any pain inflicted from Commonwealth's suspension or expulsion. Some said that the country may be affected in the preparations for the Commonwealth games and also will miss out on the association's scholarship. Some others think the country would not get all the necessary assistance that it should get from member countries. Non-attendance of meeting if Nigeria was suspended was not seen as something not to be happy about because the participants feel believe that the meetings has been of little impact to the country.

The major benefit of the Commonwealth to Nigeria according to the group is the Games although others believe its we gain security, trade, democratic help, scholarships etc.

Future of the Commonwealth

I read out the objective of this topic to the group and asked them to imagine if they were secretary generals of the commonwealth.

A participant said, as he's short term goal he will combat the issues of the 21st century like climate change, science and technology and poor internet connectivity in developing countries through enlightenment, sensitization and provision of adequate resources to attain he's purpose.

Another said he would empower youths through scholarships and provide resources to power member nations as his short term goal. One participant said he would strive to improve equity been the nations of the globe. This is his long term goal.

The future psychologist said he would prefer to engage in human emancipation and re-orientation of people's image of the Commonwealth. He will make this his long term goal.

A member of the group thinks in the next twenty years, he would ensure that up to 70% of what we discussed as solutions would have been implemented if he was the secretary general of the Commonwealth at that period.

Another participant said as a long term goal in the office of the secretary general, he would try to solve the problem of global financial meltdown by bringing forth a lasting solution to the problems of the middle-east and advocate for global peace, since no international organization has solved that problem.

Some said they would publicise the commonwealth and its values as their short term goal.

A participant explained that investing in youths would be appropriate since over half of them make up the Commonwealth. He said it would be his long term goal to make the leaders of tomorrow greater.

Another group member asserted that as a secretary general, he would desist from suspending countries whose followers are innocent of the blunder caused by their government. He said he would just declare an outright detest of the ways of the erring government, rather than making the country at large suffer from the support and benefits the Commonwealth and its member countries can offer to help, which in turn can go a long way to solve the nation's problems.

What do you think about the Commonwealth (Again)? Evaluation and Closing.

All the participants truly admitted that they found the Commonwealth chat very insightful and interesting.

On the evaluation sheet, I made sure all the participants gave their honest opinion about the chat and how I organized it. They all accepted that the discussion had changed their opinion of the Commonwealth positively.

They recommended that the discussion should involve a good number of people and for it to be publicized better. They said they would have preferred to have good orientation about the Commonwealth before they participate in the chat in order to contribute maximally to the aims of the discussion.

As the chat ended the group clearly asserted that although the Commonwealth had good motives for positive change around the globe, it had not in anyway been close to achieving its aims. They hoped a better verdict would be reached in Port of Spain this year to that would foster practicable change to the activities of the Commonwealth.

Conclusions

I urged the members to continue to find out more about the Commonwealth and I offered to give them materials that I possess about the Commonwealth. Most of the members took great interest and they wished there were more programmes set out to sensitize more people about the Commonwealth. In other words, they felt very impacted about the Commonwealth. I made mention of avenues where they can be actively involved in the Commonwealth like the My Commonwealth competition and forums on the internet.

The group then went on to have their refreshments. We ended the chat for the day by rewarding the group that won the quiz with extra refreshments as I promised.

ANNEX 4: MY COMMONWEALTH COMPETITION WINNERS

The Commonwealth in 2049

The Commonwealth started off as a network of former British colonies. But as we progress in the 21st century, we have found a new purpose as a bridge—between developed and developing nations, as well as between the East and West. We are well-poised for this role because of our sheer diversity—if the wealth of all the countries in the world were plotted on a spectrum, those at both extremes would bear the Commonwealth stamp.

Africa is one of our success stories. Its vast potential was largely overshadowed by poverty and disease at the start of the 21st century. But we had a hand in assisting the world's second-largest and second-most populous continent to modernize with surprising rapidity. Infrastructure, and not mere financial aid, is our focus, and the transfer of skills our strength. Various Commonwealth nations lent their expertise to develop sewage treatment systems and transport networks in Africa, in return for favoured status in the trade of consumer goods.

Specialisation was key to our efficiency. Singapore, internationally respected for her well-managed water resources, set up a system for the production of NEWater. India shared her experience in road-building. It might seem odd that the other Commonwealth nations were so willing to invest in Africa at a time when it was beset with poverty and disease—but I am proud to say that we alone recognised the untapped economic potential promised by Africa's vast labour pool and rich resources.

Africa's story recalls that of the country that overtook the US as the world's richest nation in per capita GDP terms last year—China. The Second Cold War, between the US and China, threatened to eclipse its predecessor when it erupted in 2020. Fortunately, as a neutral body incorporating neither superpower, the Commonwealth was able to resolve this dispute. The hostilities between the two countries polarised the world, with a staggering impact on the interdependent network of global relations. But at the 2030 CHOGM held in Singapore, the mediation of Commonwealth leaders paved the way for the mending of ties and today, the two economic powerhouses are on friendly terms, recognising that their strengths are complimentary. Cooperation, not conflict, is paramount.

When the World Wide Web was launched in the 1990s, its early pioneers could not have envisioned the development of their infant internet into an omnipresent *physical* medium that revolutionised social relationships, or its marriage with neuroscience to facilitate communications. Yet, in 2045, scientists managed to map thought energy pathways, ushering humankind into a new era of consciousness. As home to many of these institutes of cutting-edge research, the Commonwealth has been one of the first Inter-Governmental Organisations to capitalise on the *cognitive-net* (cog-net) to widen its reach, especially amongst the young. India's leadership in this area has cemented its position as the world's Information Technology (IT) capital.

The Commonwealth was a surprising player in the climate change crisis of the early 21st century. We are lucky that we possess the best scientific minds as well as a truly international outreach. This puts us in a stellar position to be an international platform for clean energy research. After five years of cross-border collaboration funded by the Commonwealth, our scientists managed to arrive at a low-cost, high-output solution that could be realistically tailored to suit each country's needs. This could not have been possible without the depth of perspectives brought to the table by scientists from our less affluent nations. It is an advantage that we cherish. Put together, their revolutionary ideas were a silver bullet against climate change. They reversed the global warming trends and catalysed a renaissance for environmental protection that has rejuvenated our century.

Submitted by: Quek Yihui
16 years old, Singapore

Un monde sans frontières; un mundo sin fronteras...A world without wrongful borders of racism, hatred, and unfounded prejudice... an egalitarian society free of any illusions of colonial rule.

A young African girl, Ayoka, looks into the eyes of a Caucasian boy named Billy saying "you are my friend, my brother; my fellow Commonwealth citizen".

The year is 2049, for these two young children, the Commonwealth is absolutely remarkable; no longer an organization of 53 nations, their commonwealth is an ideal example of international cooperation. It forms the cornerstones of justice and impartiality worldwide. Their Commonwealth brothers, sisters and friends come from more than 100 diverse nations. Absolutely no man, woman or child feels excluded. The young girl and her friend know that mutual respect for all cultures prevails, bonds between citizen and citizen; nation and nation have become increasingly strengthened. To them, the Commonwealth their parents describe seems inconceivable. They marvel at the development of the Commonwealth, much more proactive than it ever was, effectively resolving conflict, dissolving animosity and promoting tolerance. The importance of every man and his potential contribution to the world at large is endorsed and appreciated.

Many millennium development goals have been achieved, the resolve of which seemed easy because of the Commonwealth's strong moral, social and political acumen. Environmental conservation is no longer just talked about and minimally dealt with; respect for the environment is commonplace and evident by our responsible actions. Summits and meetings are not just mass gatherings, through effective communication and exciting, modern mechanisms problems are mitigated. Global issues are tackled in a timely manner. Poverty has been significantly reduced. Measures have been introduced to ensure food security. To Billy and Ayoka wars and major conflicts are almost obsolete, peace is embraced more than it ever was when their parents were young.

Privileges are evenly distributed, it is constantly impressed that each nation is of equal importance to the effective existence of the Commonwealth. No country is forced to suffer; for all recognise that together we, the people of the Commonwealth, are stronger than we could ever hope to be if we stood alone.

The idea of women being heads of major organizations no longer startles anyone as female leadership is no less common than leadership by their male counterparts. In fact, the two young children could name a female Secretary General or two. Technological advances have been maximised for the common good of all. All across the Commonwealth societies have adapted to the abundant technological presence and the marvels of it are used for the benefit of the people.

From 2009 and beyond, more than ever before, the progress charted by one, is the advancement of all. While we are not communists, we are a community, and for us to win the race all our people must reach the finish line which marks development. Though the Commonwealth is still not perfect, by 2049 it has visibly grown from strength to remarkable strength. And so, by 2049 we the Commonwealth stand stronger than we ever stood before, we shine brighter than we ever shone before. Our presence is greater than it ever was.

In 2049, the young children have a lot to say about their Commonwealth. They, as well as their Commonwealth friends the world over, are fully aware of what the Commonwealth is and can speak about the many initiatives which directly affect them. They also possess their varied untainted views on what aspect of the Commonwealth matters the most to them. However, the Common Consensus is that their Commonwealth, my Commonwealth, your Commonwealth, Our Commonwealth of 2049 is a community, a family of strong resilient members all with a common goal in mind; the safety, happiness, equality and well-being of all.

Message of the Commonwealth Secretary General to member countries on the occasion of the organisation's centenary

People of the Commonwealth nations, greetings. I am sure that you all are as proud and honoured as I am today to be celebrating the centenary of an organisation which has, throughout time, stood out as an exemplary and most efficient one.

It is indubitable that the Commonwealth has since long transcended the role of a mere organisation to become a global community, a society breaking all geographical and cultural barriers. During the last forty years, particularly, it has accepted more and more countries as members; it has embraced the world, broken down prejudices and annihilated all lingering notion of it being a vestige of the colonial period.

The Commonwealth has succeeded in establishing cooperation between countries: a special fund has been set up to help countries affected by political or economic crises or by natural cataclysms. Moreover, the organisation has ensured friendly entente and diplomacy among member states; as part of the 2030 Commonwealth Treaty, member countries, especially the richer ones, have engaged themselves to help others to supply quality education and adequate health services to their people. The Commonwealth is also involved in reducing the disparity in wealth and technology existing between rich and poorer countries. Furthermore, it has, over the years, strived to establish an environment favourable to international trade.

A Commonwealth Watch has been set up to ensure that human rights are respected in the member countries, that every child is given education at least up to the age of sixteen, that the freedom of expression is granted to all and that the concepts of democracy are applied. Members failing to adhere to set norms are not immediately suspended, nor do they have their membership terminated. The modern Commonwealth shows a predilection for peaceful resolution of conflicts, and acts upon the principle that any problem plaguing mankind should not be ignored, qualified as affecting others only, nor seen as some other group's responsibility, but should instead be solved collectively, in the hope of a better world.

The Commonwealth has not been indifferent to the pressing problem of climate change. For want of a scientific solution, we have encouraged protective measures, urged member states to cut down greenhouse gas emissions and set up widespread tree planting campaigns. The 2030 Treaty stipulates that all countries should have at least 15% of their lands dedicated to the preservation of biodiversity, especially endemic flora and fauna.

The youth, being the inheritor of our world, has been given a preponderant place and numerous opportunities to have its voice heard and to help in protecting and improving our society. Through frequent youth summits and competitions, young people are encouraged to present innovative ideas to help deal with the difficulties the modern world is facing. Through exchange programs, they get an opportunity to share their ideas and their culture. By the organisation of sports and literary competitions for those under twenty-one years of age, the Commonwealth has contributed to fostering much talent and skill. The youth are the ambassadors of tomorrow; training them to take responsible decisions and to deal with the disastrous consequences of our own impulsive ones is an endeavour the Commonwealth has taken as mission.

I thank you for making the Commonwealth what it is today and earnestly hope that that tomorrow sees a better world because of our efforts; for we work for a brighter future, for a better world, for mankind.

**Boodhoo Vijna Hiteshna,
17,
Mauritius.**

The following is a speech which I (the Secretary-General of the Commonwealth) would give at the (or a) Centenary of the Commonwealth celebration.

Since its conception in 1949, the modern Commonwealth has played many roles. From Kingmaker to venture capitalist to preacher and teacher, it took time for the organisation, born of imperialism, to find its final role and its most sturdy footing. There were times in history when Britain ruled over many of the member states of the Commonwealth, ignoring their voice and supplanting its own. But those times are long gone, and all nations in the Commonwealth now listen to each other with patience and mutual respect. In line with the organisation's ideals of democracy, equality and humanity, the Commonwealth has become the encapsulation of all things that modern nations and societies aspire to. With no single leader but speaking with a voice strengthened by diversity. Standing with all that is good in mankind and standing against all that is bad. I believe that *we*, more than any other organisation, do all we can to keep the world striving against the basest and least desirable aspects of humanity. We realise that strength comes from diversity, and encourage *all* nations to respect and nurture *all* cultures and traditions, including their own. As the world continues to destroy nature's jungles to replace them with concrete ones, The Commonwealth strives to fight for our planet because we cannot live without it. The Earth can live without us, but not vice versa. All peoples must come to realise that we are still, and may always be, wholly dependent on the life giving gifts of our natural home. Yes, the members of the Commonwealth strive to fight for the environment, but in some cases it is shooting itself in the foot, as is the entire world. All mankind must want to save the planet, or such a rescue will be impossible. We have come far over the past 100 years. Decades ago we realised that The Commonwealth should not and could not be the UN, the WHO, the World Bank or any other of the hundreds of international organisations. It cannot be summed up by an acronym a few letters long, nor should it be. It should not try and supplement the activities of other organisations with its own. It could not do everything, and would fail if it tried to do so. So The Commonwealth was reorganised into the entity we see today. A democratic institution which aims to do nothing more than promote, foster and advance ideas, philosophies and actions which benefit all peoples, places and things in and out of The Commonwealth member states. The Commonwealth is a symbol and a beacon. A symbol of what we have achieved and a beacon of what we still can. Of course conflict and argument are inevitable in a society which listens to all voices, but The Commonwealth endeavours to deal with conflict, unerringly, with words and not swords. It is, as of this moment, inevitable that people will come to blows. But all members of the Commonwealth agree that such is always the last option and that the Commonwealth is not or should ever be, an institution run from thrones of bayonets. Military matters are not for The Commonwealth to decide upon, but almost always to discourage. The Commonwealth is now built upon a solid foundation of ideas and respect. Hopefully The Commonwealth will continue to grow into an ever larger group of friendly nations with the same goal: to encourage the prosperity of all things excellent.

From Brendan Wright
DOB 15/05/1990
Geelong, Victoria, Australia

AIDS

INJUSTICE

COMMON WEALTH 2049 (100 MEMBERS)

DEMOCRACY
ILLITRACY



Calvinist

RACISM

TERRORISM

BAILA SHAKAIB
19725 PAKISTAN



POVERTY

The Age, Australia

At 60, this grand old dame is in desperate need of a makeover

Dhananjayan Sriskandarajah
July 24, 2009

THE Commonwealth turns 60 this year but poll results in seven member countries suggest that there isn't much to cheer about. The Australian results in particular offer a stark warning that one of the world's oldest and most respected international organisations needs to raise its profile and refresh images of what it stands for.

Globally, only a third of people polled could name any activity carried out by the Commonwealth and only half knew the Queen was its head. A quarter of Jamaicans think it's US President Barack Obama, and one in 10 Indians and South Africans think it's Kofi Annan.

Support for the Commonwealth also seems to vary. On average, people in the four developing countries polled (India, Jamaica, Malaysia and South Africa) were twice as likely to think the Commonwealth was important compared with those in the three developed countries (Australia, Canada and Britain). Similarly, while two-thirds of Indians and Malaysians would be sorry or appalled if their country left the Commonwealth, only about a third of people in Australia, Canada and Britain felt this way.

This is unsustainable. No international organisation has a predestined right to exist and these poll results should spark debate on whether and how this association will be relevant in the 21st century.

Australia has traditionally been a big supporter of the Commonwealth, from the Commonwealth Games to funding development projects to leading political campaigns. Yet Australians seem divided about its relevance.

It's worth noting that Australians seem well informed but one in five say they would be happy if Australia left the Commonwealth, more than double the average of the other countries polled. And, just to complicate things, Australia was the only country polled where Prince Charles was the most popular choice for the next head of the Commonwealth. Everywhere else the clear winner was a headship that rotated between members.

The obvious explanation for Australia's approach is how divided the country remains on the issue of a republic. Presumably a hard core of people love the Commonwealth for its ties to royalty, while a similarly sized group hate it for the same reasons. The problem is that both groups are equally out of touch with the reality of what the modern Commonwealth is.

One of the greatest strengths of the Commonwealth also seems to be one of its greatest weaknesses. The strong historical ties that bind members to each other — and to Britain — are an undeniable part of what makes the Commonwealth work.

However, despite the Queen being one of the most powerful symbols of the Commonwealth, monarchy can obscure what the modern Commonwealth represents. The Commonwealth, with 53 countries and 2 billion people, should be the most diverse and interesting club of nations, not just an anachronistic vehicle to promote Anglo-Australian relations or celebrate Britishness.

This is part of a wider challenge. In the immediate aftermath of Empire, the Commonwealth was a neat way of retaining and fostering links between governments and peoples in the former colonies. Yet history alone is not going to be enough to convince a new generation of people that the association is worth bothering about or indeed to convince cash-strapped governments to invest in it.

These days, it seems that people and policymakers in places such as India, Malaysia and South Africa have started to appreciate what the "modern" Commonwealth can do for them.

Not surprisingly, India — where people value the Commonwealth more than they do the United States — pushed hard for one of its nationals to be the secretary-general. While these countries are creating a truly post-"post-colonial" institution, people in Australia, Canada and Britain still seem distracted by historical legacy.

At 60, the Commonwealth is in need of a good makeover. But correcting Australian misperceptions about what it is will require bold, high-profile action. Having baulked at fully suspending Fiji for months (though this may happen at the end of July), the Commonwealth needs to show how it is contributing meaningfully to building democracy there.

On Zimbabwe — a country whose independence was championed by Commonwealth leaders such as Malcolm Fraser standing together 30 years ago, but which withdrew its membership in 2003 — the Commonwealth could be the perfect vehicle to help bring the pariah state back into the international community.

On issues such as climate change, the Commonwealth could offer an informal space for dialogue between countries that might otherwise be at loggerheads in negotiations over binding commitments. And much more should be made of the incredible people-to-people links that set the Commonwealth "family" apart from other international associations.

Whether it is through shared values or an agenda to tackle shared challenges, the Commonwealth needs to show it can make a difference on at least a few key issues. If the Commonwealth cannot win back the affection of many more Australians, it may not see its 70th birthday.

Dhananjayan Sriskandarajah is director of the Royal Commonwealth Society.

To take part in a public consultation on the future of the Commonwealth, go to thecommonwealthconversation.org

The Future of the Commonwealth

Dr Dhananjayan Sriskandarajah
31 October 2009

This week, a global public consultation is coming to Zambia. The 'Commonwealth Conversation' is gathering the opinions of thousands of people around the world on the future of the Commonwealth.

Rising from the ashes of Empire in 1949, this voluntary association of independent and equal members once seemed to point towards a brave new world order. Today, it looks increasingly tired and ineffective. As the Commonwealth turns 60, is it ready for retirement?

When Zambia first joined the Commonwealth as an independent nation in 1964, the association stood, arguably, on the cusp of its greatest period in history. Over the course of the next twenty years, it played a pivotal role in supporting decolonisation, promoting democracy and ending apartheid in South Africa. It was seen as a brave and powerful player on the international stage.

But this, it seems, is not the Commonwealth we know today. Today, its profile has slipped and many people are no longer convinced of its value or purpose. Polls conducted in seven member countries earlier this year tested people's knowledge, awareness and opinion of the Commonwealth. Their results displayed a worrying mix of indifference and ignorance.

Globally, only a third of people polled could name any activity carried out by the association and the vast majority of those could cite only the Commonwealth Games. Whilst support was higher in developing member states, in countries such as the UK, Australia and Canada less than one third of people would be sorry if their country withdrew.

An insidious malaise of indifference seems to have permeated an association that once stood at the forefront of international affairs and questions of reform and relevance are beginning to look increasingly urgent.

This challenge is nowhere clearer than in the field of democracy and good governance. It is exactly 18 years since Commonwealth leaders attempted to break new ground when they issued the Harare Declaration. This statement of core principles and values committed the association to promote democracy, defend human rights and work for sustainable development. It was a document that redefined exactly what the Commonwealth stood for. In particular, it mandated the Commonwealth to concern itself with the internal affairs of its member countries.

Yet, today, the Declaration stands less as a courageous statement of principles and more as a set of empty promises. It is an inventory of what could have been. Above the terrible screams of suffering that emanated from Sri Lanka earlier this year, the

Commonwealth's silence was deafening. Its Ministerial Action Group, the supposed custodian of Commonwealth principles, is yet to issue so much as a statement and Sri Lanka is no isolated example. This is an association that has lost its nerve.

The Commonwealth is ideally placed to be the collective voice of moral authority that is missing from today's world stage; it is the perfect vehicle for dialogue and cooperation between governments and between peoples; and it is buttressed by a civil society network that is unrivalled in its field. Yet a reluctance to speak out, a fear of causing offence and a hesitance to take bold action all conspire to stifle these potentially potent assets.

If the Commonwealth is to carve out an effective role for itself in the 21st century; if it is to show how it can add real value in a jostling arena of international organisations, it must take stock and address the issues in its own backyard. It must decide exactly what it is and what it is for. Then it must publicly re-articulate this *raison d'être*.

In its sixtieth year, the Commonwealth stands at a critical crossroad. Down one route lies a quiet retirement; down the other lies the wellspring of reform; a chance for the Commonwealth to strike out afresh, emboldened and re-energised by a brave new agenda and a purpose imbued with a new sense of clarity and cause.

The dialogue between influential Zambians and the public, as well as the collection of points of view from the Zambian people over the next month, will play a part in steering the Commonwealth down either one of these routes. But they are not alone at the wheel. Thousands of citizens, sharing their views and concerns as part of the Commonwealth Conversation, also have a crucial role to play.

In less than one month's time, the world's leaders will meet in Trinidad and Tobago for the Commonwealth Summit. Intensive negotiations are already underway. Let us hope that officials look up from their desks in time to notice the danger signs ahead.

The Commonwealth at the crossroads once again

Dr Dhananjayan Sriskandarajah
25 November 2009

I have just touched down in Trinidad for CHOGM. While I am excited about the summit, some of my friends in London have been joking that CHOGM actually stands for Caribbean Holiday on Government Money.

There is a very serious point behind these jokes: in a time of huge economic upheaval taxpayers here and around the world will not tolerate an expensive talk-shop that does not have meaningful outcomes. The T&T Government has rightly set the bar high on its expectations. In its concept paper, it argues that CHOGM 2009 is a strategic opportunity for the Commonwealth “to enhance its effectiveness and its image, and to make a leading contribution to the resolution of the great global challenges of our time.” The thousands of people arriving in Port-of-Spain this week have to make this vision a reality. A perfect storm of circumstances is gathering over Port-of-Spain. Not only is the Commonwealth celebrating its 60th year but the emerging findings of the largest ever public consultation on the future of the association are to be published later this week. Since July of this year, the Commonwealth Conversation has been gathering the thoughts, opinions and ideas of thousands of people from every region of the Commonwealth.

Four intense months of consultation have revealed an association that is loved by too few, too often for the wrong reasons. Its profile is at an all-time low. Less than one-third of people polled across seven countries could name anything the Commonwealth does. Take the Commonwealth Games out of the equation, and that proportion plummets to rock bottom. Perhaps even more worryingly, policy-makers from a broad spectrum of Commonwealth countries seem to have lost interest in the association. Asked in what situation they would reach for the Commonwealth in their foreign policy tool-box, most struggled to name any such scenario. The Conversation also found that Commonwealth insiders are frustrated and disillusioned by the neglect shown by member countries towards the association. The emerging findings of this public consultation present several clear challenges to the leaders arriving in Port-of-Spain. The Commonwealth urgently needs to raise its profile by refocusing on the principles which set it apart from other international bodies and which could provide a strong mandate for its work.

It must identify its priorities: those areas of work where it can add value in a crowded international marketplace by drawing upon its unique strengths. And it must reinvest in its people, supporting that hugely valuable network of civil society bodies which buttress the inter-governmental Commonwealth and connect it to its grassroots. Over the course of the next two years, Prime Minister Manning, as the leader of the CHOGM’s host nation, will become the Commonwealth’s chairperson in office. The Trinidadian people not only have a hugely vested interest in ensuring this summit produces a meaningful legacy, they are uniquely well placed to do so. If the Trinidadian people and Government can indeed convince visiting leaders this

week to focus on enhancing “its effectiveness and its image,” then this will be the most important CHOGM of recent times. Climate change is a good example. This week’s discussions will be important and timely, coming ten days ahead of the crucial Copenhagen summit. But Commonwealth leaders have to tread carefully here: they cannot afford for climate change to drown out all the other issues on the table but they cannot also afford to ignore climate issues. CHOGM will not produce a binding commitment on climate change. But it does represent the perfect opportunity for leaders to think about how the Commonwealth could mobilise its unique characteristics to tackle this global challenge.

The key will be to find how the Commonwealth can add value. If they seize this opportunity to think innovatively about the 60-year-old association of which they are all part, this will be the most effective way of enhancing the image of the Commonwealth as a true world player and not just a talk-shop.

People in Commonwealth circles often hark back to the Lusaka CHOGM of 1979 when, in the face of seemingly impassable obstacles, Commonwealth leaders reached consensus and paved the way for Rhodesian independence. Still today, this summit is regarded as marking a bold and pivotal turning point in Commonwealth history. This CHOGM presents an opportunity to be bold once again. This week, as leaders begin to gather in Trinidad, the Commonwealth once again stands at a crossroads; the scenery may be different, but the choice is no less crucial. Down one route lies a quiet retirement; down the other the well-spring of reform and a future bright with promise.

The findings of the Commonwealth Conversation should be wake-up call: long, all-encompassing communiqués are not going to capture peoples’ imagination in Trinidad or elsewhere. Something needs to be done to build the Commonwealth’s profile as an effective and valuable grouping. The time and money invested in this week’s summit will only bear fruit if the Commonwealth can show clear leadership in tackling global issues and deliver meaningful change. As leaders sit down for the meetings this week, they need to be asking themselves what people will remember the Port-of-Spain CHOGM for in decades to come.

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The Commonwealth Conversation

HOSTED BY THE ROYAL COMMONWEALTH SOCIETY

This report presents the final findings of the Commonwealth Conversation, a global public consultation on the future of the Commonwealth run by the Royal Commonwealth Society between July 2009 and March 2010.

It is available to download online from www.thecommonwealthconversation.org.

The Royal Commonwealth Society (RCS) is the oldest and largest civil society organisation devoted to the Commonwealth. Founded in 1868, it conducts a range of events and activities aimed at promoting international understanding. Headquartered at the Commonwealth Club in London, the RCS has some 5,000 members in the UK and a presence in over 40 Commonwealth countries through a network of branches and Commonwealth societies.

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