



International Meeting 2018

Monday 15 October

Welcome: *Her Excellency Ms Nomatamba Olivia Tambo, High Commissioner for South Africa*

The High Commissioner began by wishing all delegates a warm welcome to South Africa House. She expressed her positive view of the event and desire to collaborate on new opportunities in the future. Her Excellency noted that the Commonwealth has had a very important role in Africa, promoting core values and supporting South Africa in the fight against apartheid. She concluded that Africans need to be much more vigorous and engaged in the development of the 21st century Commonwealth and that she looks forward to hearing the outcomes of the International Meeting on Wednesday.

Welcome address: *Dr Linda Yueh, Chair, The Royal Commonwealth Society*

In her capacity as the new Chair of the RCS Board of Trustees, Dr Yueh expressed her privilege to be adding her welcome to the High Commissioner's, and thanked the latter and her staff for hosting the meeting. She emphasised the critical role of the branches as representatives of the Society, and thanked the participants for their work and passion. After giving a brief overview of the RCS's history of convening Commonwealth diplomats, civil society, and networks, Dr Yueh announced that the Society has entered a new phase and that it is well positioned as:

1. A hub for Commonwealth civil society. The Society is currently the co-ordinator of a major project from the FCO.
2. The RCS has entered an alignment with the Commonwealth Local Government Forum (CLGF) in the spirit of the Commonwealth being a hub for closer co-operation. This has resulted in a number of shared posts included the Chief Executive (Dr Greg Munro) who is also the Secretary-General of the CLGF and shared administrative costs.
3. The RCS brand is as strong as ever in its 150th year, which was seen during the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM). The Society was proud to deliver The Queen's Birthday Party Concert at the Royal Albert Hall for Her Majesty's 92nd Birthday whilst The Queen's Commonwealth Canopy (QCC) gained a number of new commitments during the CHOGM week and saw the broadcast of 'The Queen's Green Planet' on ITV with Sir David Attenborough and Her Majesty The Queen.

Dr Yueh added that she is proud of the work the Society delivers on a daily basis to uphold its Royal Charter principles and to promote the value and values of the Commonwealth for its' peoples and member states. From delivering the annual multi-faith Commonwealth Service at Westminster Abbey to establishing the QCC the Society continues to operate at the forefront of Commonwealth affairs.

Dr Yueh concluded by announcing that the Society will be celebrating its 150th anniversary at Lancaster House on Wednesday in the presence of Her Royal Highness The Duchess of Cornwall.

Address: *Dr Greg Munro, Chief Executive, The Royal Commonwealth Society*

Dr Munro (Greg) began by welcoming all delegates. He added that his opening remarks would be informal and that the Commonwealth is a family of nations but that as a group the RCS is a family as well. Greg said that he has lived in four Commonwealth countries: South Africa, Lesotho, Kenya and the United Kingdom and that he is delighted to see that for the 2018 International Meeting delegates' numbers have increased to 100 from 80 in 2016 indicating a greater show of commitment to the RCS.

The RCS is here to uphold the values in its Royal Charter and those of the Commonwealth Charter. The importance of collective action not only across branches but also across the Commonwealth is vital. We need to show the value and values of this organisation of states beyond The Royal Family and the Commonwealth Games.

It is important to work across branches and young people should be our focus as they are the future of a sustainable Commonwealth.

The Royal Charter lays out the rules for the branches and talks about mutual expectations. Greg would like to start a conversation and revisit the branch structure and potential synergies between us. He reiterated Linda's comments that there has been an administration and operational alignment with the CLGF. There remains two organisations but some shared posts. He added that the RCS and CLGF deal with two sides of the same coin – governments and communities and that we are revising the structure of how we synergise and how we can stay relevant. Greg concluded by saying that his vision was to look outwards, not inwards and to focus on communities.

Q&A session with Dr Linda Yueh and Dr Greg Munro

Zasada (Canada): noted that the overwhelming feedback from Canadian branches regarding the Commonwealth in the lead up to CHOGM was that it has a lot of potential, but until the Charter is respected it means little. His question was do we have a strategy to carry this through?

Tindnall (Guernsey): to respond to the question from Canada – how much are you engaging with parliamentarians such as myself?

Blackson (Nigeria): is there a plan for the 70th anniversary of the Commonwealth?

Shivani, Regional Coordinator, India: we should make a list of values and how we prioritise them, to create living examples.

Response from Greg: It is interesting to look back at values; they are global, universal and all encompassing. Canada is right about issues of human rights and respect. We focus on young people, gender, inclusivity and environment. We are currently working with three other organisations on reviewing the legislation in all Commonwealth countries on discrimination based on SOGI. The Commonwealth operates politically, and we understand that these are sensitive issues. As the Prime Minister of Malta said, we know that member states want to change and become more inclusive. The Commonwealth is about more than history – Chile is interested in the Commonwealth (amongst others) – it is all about values. We are the Secretariat for the All Party Parliamentary Group for the Commonwealth. Currently few MP's show up – we need to become appealing to policy makers, as that is when you can influence legislation. Exposure to policy makers for young people who can then go on to become politicians, that's what's needed, that's how we can change the world. Greg added that he was in India last week, and next year is the 150th anniversary of Gandhi's birth – India is a fundamental part of the

Commonwealth. He added that our 150th anniversary is a good time to renew the values Ghandi stood for – they are very similar to the Charter. Greg ended by saying there were no plans for the 70th anniversary yet.

Response from Linda: In terms of priorities for engagement, a striking thing about parliamentarians is that we are very privileged to have convening power – this is the most efficient way to change. We can give policy solutions and recommendations as we represent the people of the Commonwealth at those levels. All of us have to work together and present ways to improve the lives of people throughout the Commonwealth through bodies such as the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA).

Keith Stokes-Smith (Birmingham):

- CLGF branch in Birmingham has not engaged with us an RCS branch – how at local level can we work together?
- In the past, it has been apparent that RCS policy is controlled by London – a number of branches want closer engagement and better leadership in London.
- Has been lobbied by a UK territory to help them become a member of the Commonwealth, but freedom of religion is not allowed there. Keith would like RCS's opinion on that issue.
- We have an issue with FGM in Birmingham – what can we do about that?

Kaye Williams (Barbados): Would like further comments regarding the Commonwealth branches structure.

Anna (Cyprus): what role would you envisage for the RCS in the Commonwealth in the context of new impetus and reinvigoration?

Eleanor Ryan (Canada): With regard to reviewing the restructure of the branches, what do you have in mind? How will the branches be consulted and part of that discussion? What is your vision?

Response from Greg: CLGF and RCS alignment is still new. In terms of policy and engagement with branches, we are not going to get the answer in these three days, but we do need to improve connectivity and engagement. We are only 10 people in London, we cannot engage with everyone directly, we need to find an innovative way to do this. Perhaps we could develop an accreditation system based on how your work matches the values of the Charter, so that we become each other's equals. If we can identify a few branches that are keen to engage us in mapping out the architecture of the branch system, let us do this over the next six months and figure out what makes sense for our communities and how we can facilitate communication. We should be learning from each other and from the richness of our differences.

Lloyd Byrne (Victoria, Australia): Branches should be more involved in decision-making. Use regional coordinators to get feedback from the branches on various issues

Response from Greg: Regional coordinators will be engaged, they are an important link.

Response from Linda: Our relationship with the branches is crucial; you do many things not just the essay competition. This kind of community-based action is what makes us special and the RCS stand out in the Commonwealth. Thank you all for volunteering and for caring about the future, our society's better for it.

Address: UK Priorities as Chair-in-Office of the Commonwealth, *Mr Philip Parham CMG, UK Envoy to the Commonwealth*

Philip Parham welcomed delegates to London noting that the geographical spread and breadth of interest of delegates was impressive. Philip began by stating that his contribution to the meeting would outline the UK's

vision for their time as Chair-in-Office of the Commonwealth and that he would appreciate any questions and/ or feedback as to how RCS networks see their roles during this period. He added that the UK chair in office would run until Rwanda take over in 2020 (exact date to be determined).

UK's Objectives for Chair-in-Office:

1. **Drive the delivery of the ambitious targets set by Heads of Government at CHOGM.** We want the Commonwealth to be in a position when they reach Kigali in 2020 to proudly state that it met all its objectives and commitments to the international community. Philip said that the UK want to show CHOGM's generate real action and have an output.
2. We want to **boost the voice of the Commonwealth as an advocate in the international system**, which is lacking advocates. For example, symbolically, a few weeks ago, at the UN General Assembly (UNGA) when the UK Prime Minister spoke, she included a passage on the Commonwealth in her speech. This was the first time the Commonwealth voice was officially heard at the UN. The UK wants to build on that in various ways. We want the Commonwealth to reinforce and bolster the rules-based international system.
3. **Increase the practical solidarity between Commonwealth nations.** The Commonwealth is not a negotiating block like the EU or other regional groupings. It would be foolish to try to force it towards becoming something like that, but we do believe there is a space for an increased practical solidarity between states if countries understand each other's needs. Countries often compete against each other, but mutual understanding and a Commonwealth preference to be developed, all things equal, would be a good start. Over the last three weeks we have been looking at the agendas at the HRC and WTO agencies – this has been particularly useful for member states as it better allows them to understand each other's priorities and the issues. It is particularly beneficial for small states due to their limited resources. Another practical example is that in New York the UK is going to start the practice whereby Commonwealth members, which are part of the UN Security Council (UNSC), provide regular briefings to other Commonwealth members about what is happening at the UNSC to encourage solidarity and to allow the Commonwealth to feed in.
4. **Strengthen the Secretariat** – this would help the whole system to be more coherent and efficient. At the 2015 CHOGM in Malta, the Heads of Government requested a group be formed to review the governance in the Commonwealth Secretariat. This group was formed at the beginning of 2018 and was asked to produce a report for review a month before the Foreign Ministers' Meeting at New York in September 2018. The report was produced and discussed at the meeting however, there was too little time to analyse the report. Ministers therefore asked High Commissioners in London to produce recommendations around the report by 30th November 2018.

Back to point one (delivering the communique) Philip said at the 2018 CHOGM, four themes and ambitious objectives were agreed. He said that many activities are currently in progress to show concrete action is being taken. He added that we see the Commonwealth as having three pillars of equal importance – member states, Commonwealth Secretariat, Commonwealth organisations and the people-to-people networks they represent, of which the RCS is a strong example. Philip said that these networks are a vital catalyst for the first two pillars and the UK are keen to maximise the potential of these by ensuring effective collaboration between pillars.

1. Fairness pillar: the Commonwealth network of women mediators has been launched, as has the Pacific-Commonwealth Equality Project Kiribati. He added that the UK has committed over £200million to boost girls' education for 12 years of quality education in nine Commonwealth countries. Ambition set out by leaders for 12 years for both girls and boys. The UKs contribution substantial with a focus on girls.
2. Prosperity pillar: connectivity agenda. Digital, regulatory, business-to-business etc. to enhance trade and investment among Commonwealth member states. This is taking shape and the Commonwealth Secretariat has done a good job designing the framework for taking this forward. Philip added that at the WTO the SheTrade Commonwealth programme was launched which will operate in Bangladesh, Ghana, Nigeria and women-owned businesses.
3. Sustainability pillar: Blue Charter – a number of action groups are being led by member states. The UK and Vanuatu lead on the Clean Oceans Alliance, which 17 countries have signed. Each signed up member

will receive some resource for technical assistance to fulfil the aims of the programme. Each signed-up member will be required to do some of the following: ban the sale of microbeads by 2021; reduce single use plastic bags by 2021 and take steps to eliminate all single use plastic waste. The UK is also funding a marine economics programme, which supports the sustainable growth of SISs in the Pacific and Caribbean. The UK has also committed to end blindness and malaria in the Commonwealth by 2020.

4. Security pillar: Cyber declaration – this is the most widespread intergovernmental commitment in cybersecurity with action already underway in many states, in some with funding from the UK.

The UK's contribution in aggregate is for over £500 million to support the delivery of these ambitious targets. £18 million sits in the cross-government fund for conflict stabilisation and is run by the FCO. All £500 million is already committed and no further applications are been accepted. There is a cross-Whitehall steering committee officials group, which manages these strategic objectives, which feed into an inter-ministerial steering group. Philip is supported in the FCO by a cross-government unit consisting of veterans who organised CHOGM and colleagues from the Department for International Development amongst others.

Q&A session with Philip Parham

Jack Milne (Regional Youth Co-ordinator, Australia): thanks the UK government for supporting the Youth Council's, 'I Am Able' campaign. Jack added that he wants to see youth included in political decision-making. He concluded by saying that what has been achieved would not have been possible without support of countries such as the UK.

Response from PP: Youth is such an important theme and one that should have been mentioned. The UK Prime Minister and Lord Ahmad are very keen on hosting follow-up roundtables to look at youth plans and how these are taken forward. He added that disability is something he feels very strongly about as the father of a down-syndrome daughter.

Blackson (Nigeria): provided feedback from Commonwealth citizens. He added that he has travelled around and the general feeling is that we do not want CHOGM to be a talk-shop. The communique was discussed in Nigeria, but it lacked positive and concrete action. This is what we want to see, the practical impact. Blackson asked what is the mechanism to put in place and implement the communique. Blackson also asked how its achievements are measured.

Response from PP: we want to be in a position where we can say we have achieved what we set out to. Philip added that he has outlined the immediate-to long-term projects that will have a concrete impact. Philip also acknowledged that Blackson's experience allows him to rightfully question the practicality of this, as in the past it may have faltered, but added that we hope to change it this time around.

Joe Zasada (RCS Canada): welcomed the UK's commitment to Commonwealth projects adding that protection of human rights, LGBTQ and religious freedom is vital. He asked what we, as RCS branches, could do to further this cause. Concerning Brexit, he asked, is Brexit an opportunity for the UK and the Commonwealth to start a new regime e.g. CANZUK, and how can the RCS further that.

Response from PP: The fairness pillar includes democracy and human rights. WFD project with CPA to reinforce Latimer House principles. The UK Prime Minister also made a historic statement on LGBT rights and offered help from the UK to governments that want to address colonial legislation. The offer is there but this has to be handled discretely – some countries are responding to this offer. The UK has also committed funds to enhance the Commonwealth Secretariat's election observation missions. To strengthen this work, the RCS can convene to draw attention to these issues and create momentum and focus. Philip added that it is not difficult to imagine situations when it is more effective for people-to-people networks to draw attention to these issues. Post-Brexit, whatever one thinks, the decision has been made and the UK is leaving the EU in March 2019. He added that this has made the UK focus on the plethora of international opportunities. Concerning a Commonwealth-wide free

trade agreement, as a non-expert, Philip noted that this is highly unlikely given the makeup of the Commonwealth. He added however, as the connectivity agenda suggests under the prosperity theme, there is definitely more that can be done by the whole of the Commonwealth to maximise our common language and law advantage.

Associate Fellow (Nigeria): Who is eligible for SheTrade? Is it open to indigenous people? As the RCS stands for democracy, what are our plans, as the RCS, to sure the rights of indigenous people in Nigeria. One way to engage with youth is through education. How is the RCS working to engage and support the people in the Niger delta region in need of education? Will further funds be made available in the future for indigenous projects in Nigeria? How can young people support RCS goals?

Response from PP: there is no ethnic differentiation in SheTrade. It is focused on trying to ensure female entrepreneurs can access business opportunities. Your question on elections and the RCS values is for the RCS to answer. The intergovernmental pillar of the Secretariat will continue to promote the values of elections and democracy through observer missions. They will try to look less punitively at members who falter, and look more supportively at assisting them. The RCS's nature as a people-to-people network allows people to express the values of the Commonwealth, through example, The Queen's Commonwealth Essay Competition.

Blackson (Nigeria): The Commonwealth Secretariat is training electoral officers and capacity building through workshops. Democracy in Nigeria is a model for Africa, and so elections are very important. Blackson said that the branch is engaging with government and High Commissioners on these issues – they are bringing stakeholders together with parties and traditional rulers. Blackson added the RCS must stay neutral and that if supported we can convene stakeholders. He noted the issue of transparency and that people are buying votes.

Response from PP: Philip welcomed the news that the Nigeria branch is in touch with their local High Commission. He noted that the High Commission is supportive but would need to know exactly what is the best type of support they can offer is. Philip said that he does not know enough about the Niger delta so would prefer not to comment too much. He also said that he cannot commit UK Ministers to funding but would underline that the UK government has a legal obligation to spend 0.7% on ODA, which makes the UK unique among major economies. He added that there is strong cross party support to maintain that commitment but is not aware of all the partnerships in Nigeria and that contact can be made through the British High Commission in Nigeria.

Hari Om (Regional Youth Co-ordinator, India): Welcome the UK as Chair-in-Office. Hari said that the UK has had a very successful collaboration with us on the UK-India visa partnership. Hari added that we are seeing the RCS campaign for this issue, but have seen no positivity regarding this from the government. Hari asked what the UK government's stance towards this campaign is.

Zasada (Canada): Would be interested to hear more about the pillars and goals in detail. He said that if we could share this information it would help attract new members. Joe requested a report card regarding the progress of the goals.

Presley (Kenya): Cyber security is one of the biggest threats to our democracy. What did you mean by more resilience building between states?

Shivani (Regional Co-ordinator, India): Added that she has discussed the visa campaign with the Indian diaspora member of Parliament. She said that it was expected there would be a MoU agreed during CHOGM but this did not happen – how can the RCS work towards that? She asked whether the problem was that it could not be established whether people without papers are really of Indian descent.

Response by PP:

- UK-India Visa Campaign: It is not that the message did not come through loud and clear, but as we go through Brexit, the immigration process and visa criteria is very sensitive. The way the argument is

phrased is that we are in favour of openness evenly across the world, not granting any preferential treatment to any nation and not discriminating however, I cannot provide you with much more. Over the years, this may change. The RCS and networks like it can make sure governments understand the practical implications of these policies.

- Bulletin / report card: we would be happy to look at that for you to share with your members.
- Cyber security: the point is there are many vulnerabilities and it is critical to prosperity and security. Encouraged Presley to read the cyber declaration as this is what governments have agreed among themselves to maximise benefits. Practical steps are being taken to identify states' weaknesses and how these can be rectified.

Tanvir (Bangladesh): request to UK Envoy to recommend to the FCO to enhance budget for climate change fund.

Response by PP: £5.5 million is already committed, which is significant. Resources are allocated widely also on girls' education for the period of the chair in office. What comes after these two years is to be discussed in the coming months.

Judith Elson (Regional Co-ordinator for the Americas): speaking for Canada and Britain, Judith shared that the average person has little idea of what the Commonwealth is and what it stands for. Judith added that she has judged essays in the competition for a number of years but it is clear that children do not know what the Commonwealth is – this needs to be addressed. She added that it is the responsibility of us all to raise awareness of the Commonwealth.

Response by PP: Philip agrees with Judith. He said that there was a big effort around CHOGM to increase awareness on what the Commonwealth is and what it does. We need to be more effective, strategic communication efforts around the Commonwealth and all three pillars must be involved.

Libby Ellis (Regional Co-ordinator, Australia): proposes that a Commonwealth gate be established at Heathrow to welcome Commonwealth citizens – delegates received this very well.

AFTERNOON SESSION: YOUTH ENGAGEMENT AND PARTICIPATION

Introduction: Setting the context and why it matters, Sushil Ram and Lawrence Muli, Commonwealth Secretariat

Sushil Ram, Programme Manager, Commonwealth Secretariat

Sushil started by stating that strong partnerships with organisations such as the Royal Commonwealth Society are important. The Commonwealth's 53 member countries have a combined population of more than 2 billion, of which more than 60% are under 30 years of age. The Commonwealth sees young people aged 15-29 as assets to a country's development who should be empowered to realise their potential. Young people have a proven capability to lead change, and are a vital and valuable investment for now and the future.

Sushil posed the question – what is participation and youth participation. Sushil discussed the human rights framework and UN declaration. He outlines articles 12 and 13 in the Commonwealth Charter (below) and discussed how participation and holistic development adds value to diplomacy.

Article 12: Gender Equality: We recognise that gender equality and women's empowerment are essential components of human development and basic human rights. The advancement of women's rights and the education of girls are critical preconditions for effective and sustainable development.

Article 13: Importance of Young People in the Commonwealth: We recognise the positive and active role and contributions of young people in promoting development, peace, democracy and in protecting and promoting other Commonwealth values, such as tolerance and understanding, including respect for other cultures. The future

success of the Commonwealth rests with the continued commitment and contributions of young people in promoting and sustaining the Commonwealth and its values and principles, and we commit to investing in and promoting their development, particularly through the creation of opportunities for youth employment and entrepreneurship.

Sushil added that youth can develop through participation. He outlined article 8 of the Commonwealth Charter.

Article 8: Good Governance: We reiterate our commitment to promote good governance through the rule of law, to ensure transparency and accountability and to root out, both at national and international levels, systemic systematic corruption.

Sushil moved on to discuss the [Commonwealth Secretariat Strategic Plan](#). He made particular reference to point 3.3 (Youth and Social Development). He then outlined the structure of the [Commonwealth Youth Programme](#) – the outfit through which the Commonwealth Secretariat has delivered its youth development work and has been supporting member countries for the last 40 years. The Commonwealth Youth Programme engages and recognises young people; supports member governments and professionalises youth work. The CYP was established by Commonwealth Heads of Government and aims to:

"...work towards a society where young men and women are empowered to develop their potential, creativity and skills as productive and dynamic members of their societies and participate fully at every level of decision-making and development, both individually and collectively, promoting Commonwealth values of international co-operation."

CYP advocates the effective participation of young women and men in the development process and for social transformation and values their full engagement at all levels of decision-making.

Sushil outlined who the CYP work with (3 pillars):

- Youth workers
- Youth / Sport Ministries
- Youth leaders

Lawrence Muli, Programmes Team- Youth Division, Commonwealth Secretariat

Lawrence Muli discussed the rationale around youth participation. He outlines the institutionalised youth plan, how youth work is mainstreamed, the evidence-based approach; the rights based approach and the need for intergenerational dialogue and spaces. Lawrence discusses youth advocacy and action. He outlined how all youth networks create action.

Q&A session with Sushil and Lawrence:

David Spence (Vancouver Island, Canada): concerned by differentiation between youth and others. He asked whether we are putting youth into a separate category and how we encourage mixing between youth and others.

Kenneth Gyamerah (Ghana): the Commonwealth defines youth as 18-29. This is a problem for those aged 25-35 – what happens with them?

Response:

- 18-29 youth question – the Commonwealth Youth Council are currently looking at this definition to see if it needs expanding as they recognise this is an issue. Other Commonwealth (including the RCS) are more flexible in their approach and interpretation of youth.

- Integration: Lawrence discusses the creation of professional spaces. He provides the example of the Commonwealth women's mentoring scheme, which, provides six months membership and provides a number of soft skills. It also encourages integration through the provision of professional mentoring. He would like to see this rolled out across the Africa region. Sushil adds that spaces should be created to help facilitate space for youth and other ages to mix.

SESSION 1: Young Adults' Vision for The Royal Commonwealth Society Q&A session

Helen Jones introduced all the present Regional Youth Co-ordinators at the meeting:

- Hillary Briffa, Europe
- Jenny Stodola, Americas
- Dhanesh Basil, Asia
- Hari Om Dahiya, India
- Jack Milne, Australia
- Gideon Commey, Africa

Hillary Briffa, Regional Youth Coordinator, Europe

Hillary Briffa outlined what the youth co-ordinators do. She outlined the youth day (which occurred on Sunday 14th October) and its three components: what youth can add, what skills they can bring and the challenges. She added there is a desire and a will to be involved, but confusion on how to integrate with the branches. Hillary discussed the practical implications of the ideas.

Gideon Commey, Regional Youth Coordinator, Africa

Gideon Commey noted that there is a recognition by the RCS that there is a need for a strong youth network. He said that we need to dispel the notion that the Commonwealth is a relic. He added that we need to break away and chart a future Commonwealth in name and Commonwealth by nature. He is looking to encourage branches to engage with youth.

Jenny Stodola, Regional Youth Coordinator, Americas

Jenny Stodola discussed the youth programme and what occurred. She outlined the local, regional and international leadership and that two levels have emerged: RCS London and its associated networks. She said that the RCS needs to look at how it can utilise and facilitate its Associate Fellows and Queen's Young Leaders and vice versa. Their connection to branches needs to be analysed for mutual benefit.

SESSION 2: What works and how to do it? Facilitated by: Helen Jones MBE, Director of Youth Affairs and Education Programmes

Helen Jones facilitated the session by outlining the youth and education programmes run by the Royal Commonwealth Society. Helen then introduced Coral Fleming who manages The Queen's Commonwealth Essay Competition.

1. How to engage with schools – The Queen's Commonwealth Essay Competition: Coral Fleming, Kenneth Gyamerah and Angela Jeune.

Coral Fleming, Programme Officer: Youth, Education and Inclusion, RCS London

Coral outlined [The Queen's Commonwealth Essay Competition](#) and provided background to the upcoming 2019 theme launch by HRH The Duchess of Cornwall during The Royal Tour ([read the Press Release](#)). Coral

then handed over to Kenneth Gyamerah who supports the Competition in Ghana. Kenneth introduced himself as a teacher who works at a school in a rural part of Ghana. Kenneth outlined how participation in the Competition has grown in Ghana over the years and described how he would like to see increased outreach and participation by children living in rural parts of Ghana in the future. Angela Jeune provided her experience with the Competition. She provided background to the difference between private and state schools in the UK and the impact this has on participation. Angela also posed the question of how we can celebrate the winners / make a bigger show of the whole process and maintain their engagement with the RCS.

2. Model Youth CHOGMs: Darryl Stevens, Luke Battcock and Gideon Commey

Helen Jones introduced the concept of a [Model Commonwealth Summit](#). She said that it acts much like a model UN scenario, with individuals acting as the heads of government of Commonwealth countries and engaging in discussions as their country would. Critically, country representatives in a Model Commonwealth Summit must reach a consensus on the issues discussed, adding a challenging element that is of great contemporary importance. Helen added that it is a fun, active way of demonstrating how the Commonwealth works and allows students to actively participate in the learning process. It teaches presentation, research and critical thinking skills, as well as global awareness and cultural understanding. Helen continued to say that some students are also chosen for roles outside of country representation – including media, communicate and others.

Darryl Stevens, Regional Coordinator, Pacific

Darryl added that it is important that a Model Youth CHOGM be not only run for young people but by young people. Darryl outlined the model CHOGM that had recently taken place in September with key focuses having been trade and security. Darryl added that it is important to engage and the support of VIPs to raise the level of the event.

Luke Battcock (Canada) explained his involvement in Canada in the model CHOGM has and like Helen outlined the importance of a consensus-based system.

Gideon Commey (Africa) addressed the question of why we run model CHOGMs. He said that it is important that we do not underestimate the power of youth and their contribution. Gideon added that it is a lot of work to organise – the majority being in the planning so it is important to have the mechanics and the manpower in place. Gideon concluded by encouraging delegates to be creative in their approach.

3. RCS Youth Networks: Associate Fellows & CYGEN

Helen Jones introduced the session by providing a brief outline to the [Commonwealth Youth Gender Equality Network \(CYGEN\)](#) and the recent Gender Equality Future Advocates Training that took place in July 2018 in Colombo, Sri Lanka.

Deborah Headley, Programme Officer: Networks, RCS London

Deborah Headley (Debbie) outlined the [Associate Fellow programme](#). She described how it offers young people from across the Commonwealth the opportunity to become part of an ever-growing network, offering opportunities, resources and a platform for discussion. She added that the Associate Fellowship is granted to those who have demonstrated a sustained commitment to promoting the values of the Commonwealth and are working to improve the lives of Commonwealth citizens.

4. Youth interchange programmes and opportunities for collaboration: Dhanesh Basil and Hari Om Dahiya

Tuesday 16 October

Welcome: *Dr Greg Munro, Chief Executive, The Royal Commonwealth Society*

Greg welcomed delegates to Central Hall Westminster. He noted the need for revitalisation and intergenerational dialogue. He acknowledged that the RCS needs to share better and more information with branches. He noted that the first day's programme looked at how branches can engage youth with their programmes.

Greg posed the question: how do we reshape the architecture? He noted the need to work with branches (one amongst equals).

He noted that the reach of the RCS was less than previously thought – 22 branches in Commonwealth countries and affiliated branches such as the Nordic-Baltic Hub, which is essential for The Queen's Commonwealth Essay Competition.

RCS structure and revitalisation:

- Key to engage parliamentarians
- Is not one size fits all – will be discussed by working group
- How do we fundraise and programme together noting that soft power is hard to fund.
- How do we remove RCS affiliation / approach this issue – could this be a peer issue?

Greg thanked regional and youth co-ordinators for their voluntary support.

Session 1: Branch panel discussion: Integrating youth – branch benefits

Chair: Mrs Libby Ellis OAM, Regional Co-ordinator, Australia; President, RCS South Australia branch

Libby Ellis, Regional Coordinator, Australia

Libby Ellis began by stating that whilst she agreed to chair this panel she has more questions than answers. She added that her branch has tried several times to engage youth but that for the last decade survival has been the main aim. Over the last few years the branches outlook has changed and we are looking to engage youth. She said that South Australia promotes the essay competition and reaches out to winners when they know who they are. She also added that winners are offered a two-year complimentary membership to the branch. She noted that her branch has not yet identified how to keep the youth involved. She added that they are now targeting 40-50 year olds, as they need to have a core group of people keeping the branch going.

Dhanesh Basil, Regional Youth Co-ordinator, Asia: provided a youth perspective and suggested the following:

- Need for youth involvement in branch structure.
- Look for in-country transformation programmes (not just AF's, QYL's) – these tend to be more interested, relevant and reliable youth.
- Branches should be more inclusive particularly concerning projects etc.
- Mentorship programme

Jenny Stodola, Regional Youth Co-ordinator, Americas

Jenny focused on the psychology of the typical young person and their relationship with the RCS. She noted that it was clear there are challenges with membership and that branches should adopt a multi-pronged approach. Branches need to have a strong offer and a strong ask. She suggested that branches focus on those aged 35 and under, as they are likely to be driven individuals. She added that the Commonwealth is not a known entity (apart from the monarchist link). Jenny suggested Model CHOGM's as one way to engage interested young individuals.

She noted that a number of youth tend to drop off after one event. Jenny suggested a possible solution to this is to have one dedicated champion who is interested in speaking with younger members for a length of time after an event (or at another point) to find out what they are interested in and how they are aligned.

Active engagement / the support of Commonwealth clubs is another way of attracting younger and more traditional members (with an interest in the club structure).

Mentorship – clear development structure and offer of engagement with branch roles.

Key point: Spend time getting to know young people as individuals, find out what they are interested in and ask them questions.

Blackson Olaseni Bayewumi, Country Director, The Royal Commonwealth Society, Nigeria noted the general lack of knowledge about the Commonwealth and suggested:

- Organising Model CHOGMs – involve relevant organisations and government departments. Events such as these lead to youth having a greater knowledge of the Commonwealth and a greater interest.
- Platform to promote essay competition at schools. Use this as a platform to engage all generations.

Q&A session with panellists:

Zasada (Canada): made delegates aware of a speech Jenny gave which is on You Tube. Jenny added that it is north American centric but it is about how young professionals can engage and she would be happy to share it.

Peter Mann, Regional Coordinator, Asia

Peter said that Hong Kong has a mentoring scheme. He added that they hold events at the university – this allows students to ask questions and provides potential future members. Peter encouraged branch members to engage with local universities especially if you already have contact.

- **Libby Ellis:** how did you engage with the university and attract so many youth?
- **Peter Mann:** said that they have 200 paid members but many more ‘friends’ of the RCS. He added that people are happy to give up their time to mentor.

Godfrey Hall (Bath and District): said that they were an ageing branch so had to take a radical approach. They decided to encourage students and as a result reduced their membership to £1, as there are a number of Commonwealth students at UK universities and established volunteer student coordinators. He added that do not host many events (perhaps 5 a year) but do so with other organisations e.g. Britain-Australia Society and publicise these over social media. Godfrey asked panellists to comment on the power of social media.

- **Dhanesh Basil (Asia):** IM2018 is a good example – look at how many attendees are tweeting/ posting on Facebook. All of this raises the RCS profile and encourages participation and interest
- **Jenny Stodola (Americas):** referenced Nicola Brentnall’s (The Queen’s Commonwealth Trust) attendance at yesterday’s meeting as she had heard about it on twitter. She added that posts should be informative and inspirational – can reach more people and amplifies the voice.

Julie Gameau (South Australia): What sort of meetings / activities do young people want to attend?

- **Jenny Stodola (Americas):** have you asked them what they want? Have a conversation with those who did not attend more than one or two events. She added that there is an element of selfishness in personal and professional development. It is a competitive space and often the first question will be - what can I get out of this?
- **Anna (Cyprus):** has support of the university and are based at the university. They have the advantage of having access to a large pool of students (22 Commonwealth countries represented). She encouraged branches to involve youth in organising events and suggested things such as Commonwealth day celebrations and panel discussions. She also added that branches should operate in a digital environment.

Session 2: Rejuvenation and inter-generational renewal – meeting the challenges
Chair: Cheryll Belle (Regional Co-ordinator, Caribbean; Chair, RCS Barbados Branch)

Cheryll Belle, Regional Coordinator, Caribbean

Cheryll opened the discussion by stating that it is important to look at rejuvenation strategies but that it was also important to respect and recognise RCS elders for their contribution to the Society's survival. Cheryll described how RCS Barbados had trialled many strategies to increase its younger members through Model CHOGM's, subsidised member rates and a youth committee. She noted however, that rejuvenation efforts have largely failed and that of their 150 membership, only 2% are youth. This should not dissuade other branches from trying however, as no one template or strategy fits all.

Victor Ndede, Chairman-designate, RCS Kenya Branch

Attract and retain. Victor described how working with partners helped to secure meeting places for the new board in Kenya. Contacts such as St. John's Ambulance had readily come to their aid. By building through local British Council offices, they hoped to extend a branch structure through other Eastern States.

Darryl Stevens, Regional Co-ordinator, Pacific; Chair, RCS Wellington Branch

Delivered a presentation about Commonwealth Youth New Zealand (CYNZ) and its flagship student CHOGM's. CYNZ is a youth membership organisation and is youth led. It provides young members with the opportunity to meet with diplomats and participate in roundtables with visiting delegates e.g. its Executive team will meet with TRH The Duke and Duchess of Sussex on their tour to the Pacific and have already engaged with New Zealand's Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern ahead of the 2018 CHOGM. Darryl suggested that delegates be aware of the 'revolving door' i.e. a lack of long term commitment meant that the young people themselves were always training up those to follow in their roles.

David Syrad, RCS Japan Branch

David revealed that upon setting up the Japan branch they had expected that the majority of their engagement would be with international schools and diaspora communities. Indeed Japan have found the opposite – the majority of their activity is purely with Japanese organisations who view the RCS as a gateway to the Commonwealth. David added that in the future they are hoping to organise Model CHOGMs with international schools in parallel with the local schools and that they are likely to adopt Hong Kong's model of a core membership and lots of 'friends' of the RCS.

Q&A session:

Cayman Islands: proposed that the RCS reconfigure its regions on geographical rather than political grounds, thus Belize, Guyana and the Cayman Islands would be within the Caribbean.

- **Nathan McKenzie, Head of Public Affairs and Engagement, RCS London,** confirmed that this would be introduced.

Kay Barnard (Bristol): outlined how Bristol had collaborated with other organisations to host a Commonwealth Big Lunch of which 300 people attended. She requested that branches be provided with advice on using social media and campaigns. She advised that Bristol will be working with the local Girl Guides on Commonwealth Day to organise a Commonwealth Film Festival.

Kaye Williams (Barbados): described how Barbados had a distinct calendar of youth engagement through Commonwealth conversations at universities. She emphasised the importance of broad based engagements and the need to sow seeds with the youth now to secure future rejuvenation.

Luke Battcock (Canada): the RCS mission is to education people about and promote the Commonwealth.

Tom Sears (Ottawa / Barbados): asked Victor what it was about the RCS that encouraged him to rejuvenate the Kenyan branch.

- **Victor Ndede:** the values of the Commonwealth and contemporary issues such as the environment. He is here to fix the mess.

Daniella Tilbury and John Verrall (Gibraltar): asked how the panel see the future of the Commonwealth.

- **Victor Ndede:** the future of the Commonwealth is its youth.
- **David Syrad** outlined the discussions being held about how Japan could forge a stronger relationship with the Commonwealth and how the Commonwealth could be more inclusive. He said there was always interest from other countries in joining or achieving a closer relationship with the Commonwealth. David referenced France's interest in the 1950s.

Plenary: Summary of regional breakout discussions;

Chair: Mrs Judith Elson, Regional Co-ordinator, Canada

AFRICA

Mr Victor Ndede (Kenya)

Victor shared the following key learnings with delegates:

1. Integration of youth with the branches
2. Branch to branch development
3. Impacting youth early
4. Associate Fellows to support branches. Youth will be at the front of efforts to rejuvenate the RCS.
5. Engage Commonwealth Scholarships Alumni
6. Increased and better communication from RCS London.
7. Mentoring for young branch leaders.

Victor also shared the following concerns discussed by the group:

- Concern over turnover of staff at RCS London. The group feels this leads to a lack of continuity of vision – desire for turnover to reduce.
- Cameroon: human rights violations
- Youth unemployment in Africa

Judith Elson (Americas) reflected that youth and its importance is evident here, as is the need to network and collaborate branches. Judith noted the need for support from London to individual branches and the concern for advocacy and human rights, elections, and youth unemployment.

AMERICAS AND THE CARIBBEAN

Joe Zasada (Canada)

1. Desire for more branches in the Caribbean but this is made difficult by high travel costs.
2. A shift in how we approach young people is needed – keep in touch with youth contacts, as they may need two or three meet-ups to convince. Maintain an inclusive approach as to divide youth from others is negative.
3. Desire for an international web forum for branch members. RCS Canada is willing to lead on this in consultation with others.
4. Use RCS Fellow title as a form of prestige. Make it desirable.
5. Suggest free membership for students and a low fee for non-students.
6. Introduction of webinars

7. Share contact details of members from all branches.
8. Public/ individuals need more education about the Commonwealth
9. Branches need mission objectives not just more members.

Judith Elson (Americas): the key messages seem to be that emphasising youth too hard may create a divide. We should strive to obtain members from all age groups and develop communication that is suitable for all. There is also a desire for the creation of a global web forum and the need for RCS to communicate key learnings from international meetings like CHOGM.

ASIA

Peter Mann (Asia)

Asia fed back the following from their discussion:

1. That of the eight Commonwealth countries in Asia there is only one that does not have an RCS Branch – Brunei – Peter added that he is currently working on this.
2. Hosting a regional conference in Kuala Lumpur in March 2019.
3. Pakistan will be making a bid to host the 2020 International Meeting.
4. Creation of a Commonwealth Cricket Club – this was started in India and Hong Kong have now adopted this. In November, Hong Kong will host a Consul General’s Cricket tournament for their 150th anniversary event. The evening dinner will include a charity auction, which will be in aid of the HK Epilepsy Society. Peter added that he is hoping for a cricket match in Kuala Lumpur as part of the conference and that the Pakistan branch would like to include this as one of the events for the 2020 International Meeting.
5. Tony from Singapore will be talking about the environment and plastics. He is experimenting with the idea of tagging plastic with a block chain technology, which is a start in terms of accountability and plastic reduction. He is also organising a fashion show with recycled plastic items – this will travel to various locations worldwide.
6. Other conference items will include discussion of the Commonwealth advantage in trade, water hygiene (Bangladesh) and future water resources.

Judith Elson (Americas): hopes to see people at both meetings. Cricket is clearly a key theme and using it as a means to raise awareness is a good, positive idea. Plastic is close to all of our hearts and there is a need for action. The environment is a big concern for us all.

EUROPE

Anna Leyden (UK)

1. Importance of updating information and keeping London up to date where branch roles had changed and possibly post-holders were deceased.
2. Requested clarification on how to nominate Associate Fellows.
3. Requested clarification on RCS communication strategy.
4. Resource sharing.
5. Request for an international web forum / page.

Judith Elson (Americas): lack of communication has come up again as has the reference for this potential web forum to be created to disseminate information. Sharing of email addresses would be helpful. Request for resources in terms of know how.

PACIFIC

Libby Ellis (Australia) and Darryl Stevens (Pacific)

1. Suggested streamlining London’s role by only emailing Regional Co-ordinators.
2. Request for London to share programme information at concept stage e.g. Queensland visit.

3. Formal inclusion of RYC's within branch structure proposed – Darryl advised that he had done so to avoid RYC Amber Kale being isolated; similarly for Auckland.
4. Papua New Guinea – new branch in process. Tonga a possibility.
5. Fiji – Kanti had helped to re-establish a branch.
6. Victoria has offered to set a web page similar to that proposed earlier.

Judith Elson (Americas) pointed out that communication should be centrally disseminated from London and that there was again a request for planning and advance notice before things are put in place. She reiterated the concern about membership and the suggestion that newsletters should be added to a centralised website/ forum. Judith thanked all for the many aspects, which came through the regional discussions.

Greg Munro (RCS London): some issues have arisen and we have answers. Greg said he has been asked to explain the architecture of the Commonwealth and where the RCS fits in. Greg said that he would include this in his presentation tomorrow morning, as it requires more than a 15-minute presentation. Indeed, it requires consultation and discussion with you all.

Q&A session

Hari Om Dahiya (India): asked whether we touched on the topic of slow responding branches. He asked whether there can be a joint effort or mechanism to resolve this.

- **Zasada (Canada):** all efforts should be taken before pulling the plug on a branch. We should try to identify a way to ensure they receive our emails. Approach should be positive rather than punitive.
- **Peter Mann (Asia):** generic emails never work – personal contacts are much better. Peter added that that is the beauty of meetings such as these – the networking.
- **Anna (Cyprus):** Associate Fellows have mentioned that when they have contacted branches they have not received a response. Anna calls for branches to be more responsive to those emails to ensure new members are not missed out.
- **Hillary Briffa (Europe):** RCS London can only use the information we gather – on the website all branches are listed and have listed personal contacts. Branches need to take responsibility for ensuring London has the latest information e.g. change of chair, deceased etc.

Suggestion for more user-friendly media and communication styles – many people do not know how to do this.

- **Anna (Cyprus):** acknowledged that the younger generation know how to use social media better. She suggested that branches talk with Associate Fellows about how we can work together on this.
- **Joe Zasada (Canada):** Canada's speeches from their national conference are on YouTube. There is a cost associated with video production – professional video production is expensive. Joe said that Canada paid \$5-6k for video production of conference so not all branches could afford this.
- **Peter Mann (Asia):** branches must have a good and regularly updated website. Hong Kong have produced videos, has a Facebook page and uses LinkedIn. Peter said that each time they host an event they produce colourful fliers to promote them. He said that this type of promotion works well and gathers a good crowd of people.
- **Nathan McKenzie, Head of Public Affairs and Engagement, RCS London**
Nathan encouraged delegates to use #RCSIM2018 #OurCommonwealth. Nathan added that at registration tomorrow morning there would be a form for email addresses and for delegates to sign away facilitation of connections. Nathan added that London would often like to communicate more but cannot. He also reminded delegates that local tech colleges were often willing to help in exchange for access.

Presentation: Localising the Sustainable Development Goals and the Role of Cities, Ms Lucy Slack, Deputy Secretary-General, Commonwealth Local Government Forum

Lucy Slack, Deputy Secretary-General, Commonwealth Local Government Forum, London

Lucy Slack began by outlining who the Commonwealth Local Government Forum (CLGF) are, what they do and invited delegates to be a part of that conversation. She asked delegates to reflect on this and at the end to think about what you are already doing in this space, what you would like to take up and what we can do collectively.

Questions from Lucy to delegates:

1. How familiar are you with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and in the local context?
2. Is there a role for RCS branches to raise awareness?
3. What are you already working on that is part of the SDGs? Local dimension?

Q&A session:

Hari Om Dahiya (India): How is CLGF different from the CPA? Themes of work seem very similar i.e. promoting democracy and governance. Hari asked Lucy to explain the difference.

- **Lucy Slack (CLGF London):** the difference is that CLGF work is local whilst CPA's is parliamentarians. We are working increasingly closely with CPA. Lucy explained CLGF's Associated Organisation status in the Commonwealth and how they are not quite civil society but also not quite inter-governmental. Lucy added that they both also focus on issues such as women in politics.

Jenny Stodola (Americas): Jenny said that before being made aware of the alignment and closer relationship she had had the opportunity to participate in local sustainability hub awards. Jenny asked if the RCS could take the role more formally with branches to connect action on sustainable cities with CLGF.

Louis Belle (Barbados): provided a statement on the Caribbean – the environmental challenge and the national initiatives underway. Louis noted how the ocean covers two thirds of our planet and SIDS are generally in the middle of it. Marine and coastal ecosystems are essential to preventing coastal erosion like coral reefs as barriers for waves. Beaches support recreational activities and local economies like tourism etc. the health and status of ocean ecosystems are showing signs of stress. In Barbados 70% live in coastal areas and economies are highly dependent on marine ecosystems. The high concentration of people in these areas make them vulnerable to extreme weather events. Environmental conservation goes hand in hand with economic development. Comparison with SIDS and developed countries – very different emphasis. Pollution from modern technological development seems more important than the need to sustain the natural environment; oil drilling and lack of environmental enforcement in the Caribbean. Caribbean countries are struggling with the influx of seaweed etc. strong smelling and rotting – this problem has increased recently. Normal voluntary efforts to clean beaches are proving ineffective – also coincides with tourism season. Fishermen are also worried about diminishing catch due to seaweed. Barbados tourism needs to protect beaches but some efforts have made matters worse. No doubt, climate change will have serious implications for SIDS. The Barbados government recognises that serious environmental challenges need to be overcome. Barbados has Mauritius strategy for SIDS – agenda 21. Overarching framework for template.

Response from Lucy Slack (CLGF London): These issues are key for local government – providing an enabling environment and engaging with local communities to build resilience. Also, crucially having access to resources to implement change at local level. Local communities usually know much better what is needed than a top-down-capital-led approach. CLGF puts in place this kind of governance. Lucy asked how we could use what we have on the ground, as local communities know better.

Joe Zasada (Canada): asked if there are any Canadian members of CLGF.

- **Lucy Slack:** Yes – the Federation of Canadian Municipalities.

Keith Stokes Smith (Birmingham): Is there a list of members?

- **Lucy Slack:** No but Birmingham is a member. Suggested that they could share internally.

Request for presentation to be shared.

Nathan McKenzie (RCS London): the word local is what this keeps coming back to – engaging local communities on the SDGs. Nathan revealed that his view of the RCS is that it is right at the heart of that. He added we do not have a specific focus and thematic focus. Our strength is convening on a broad range of issues. Unless we are, connecting local communities with the values of the Commonwealth will die. It must remain relevant – cities and green spaces are both key – there is a space there for the RCS.

Panel discussion: Environmental challenges

Asia Williams, Commonwealth Youth Climate Change Network

The Commonwealth Youth Climate Change Network (CYCN) was established in 2009 during the Young Commonwealth Climate Summit in London, where 150 young environmental leaders gathered to share experiences and expertise.

The CYCN aims to build the capacity of young people in their endeavours to address climate change and other environmental issues, and advocate on climate change from a youth perspective.

The network (now 1000+ members) is run by a team of dedicated volunteer professionals and young people from across the Commonwealth, with support from the Youth Division of the Commonwealth Secretariat.

The CYCN supports actions that empower young people to translate climate change programmes into effective policies that will have a measurable impact on youth well-being. It also links projects implemented by its members across the Commonwealth in order to develop common actions and campaigns.

CYCN members advocate within national and local governments, as well as in international agencies and global spaces such as the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, to ensure that future generations are spared from the harshest effects of climate change.

Asia added the protection of the environment has always been an important issue for the Commonwealth and one, which is enshrined in the Commonwealth Charter ([Article 10](#)). She added that it is a particularly pertinent issue for Commonwealth young people who are concerned as their futures are impacted directly by decisions made now about the environment.

She said that the CYCN is looking to mainstream climate change mitigation across all policies. She described how the network share policies (such as the 5p plastic bag charge in the UK) with the network, the Commonwealth Secretariat Youth Division and the youth constituency FCCC youth council.

Asia outlined how CYCN was active at the 2018 CHOGM – training people to be climate change negotiators. CYCN also held a workshop on an internship in the Seychelles and heard from people about capacity building to reduce marine pollution and increase resilience and sustainability in the Commonwealth. Asia continued to outline how CYCN is focused on how we are exceeding planetary boundaries regarding ozone depletion and resources and are reviewing action on these issues. She said they reviewed the Paris Agreement and discussed its delivery – how they would like it to be implemented. Asia added members would like to see a business levy, money pooled and used on projects for climate change mitigation. She discussed the partnership with the SCPICS (based in Brussels) and how they have taken the CYCN's ideas and implemented a plastic-free challenge.

Asia summarised how they have developed a plastic model that maps out how much plastic one uses – you input it and it translates it into kilograms and carbon emissions – Asia hopes that this model may encourage people to reduce their plastic usage. She provided the example of how they had ran this with one UK Company who used 9000 plastic cups a week totalling 580kgs of plastic a week just from one company. Result – the company introduced reusable cups and provided employees with reusable bottles.

Sustainability campaign established to engage young people across the network. Asia said CYCN sent out a survey to all its members asking them how they would tackle sustainability and what ideas they have. CYCN chose 31 participants, created profiles around them, and turned it into a campaign to inspire people to share ideas and take action.

Nathan McKenzie, Head of Public Affairs and Engagement, RCS London

Nathan gave a presentation on The Queen's Commonwealth Canopy (QCC).

Nathan revealed that Zambia had recently provided details of their dedication – a commitment to plant 1,000,000 trees. He said that whilst we have not reached 53 countries dedicated we are getting closer – we are currently at 42.

Next steps: The QCC is still diplomatically focused but phase two is where we will take the architecture of the QCC and connect it with local communities. Ask us for a point of contact and we will connect you. Nathan added that the QCC also wants to create a knowledge exchange / scholarship programme and establish QCC centres of excellence.

Uncommitted countries include:

1. Botswana
2. The Gambia
3. Lesotho
4. Mozambique
5. Swaziland
6. India
7. Kenya
8. Samoa
9. Solomon Islands
10. Tanzania

Jeff Ardron, [Commonwealth Blue Charter Lead](#), Commonwealth Secretariat

Jeff began by stating that the Blue Charter was adopted at CHOGM in April 2018. It is a Commonwealth initiative that all 53 countries have signed up to. It even graced the cover of the most recent *Commonwealth Voices* magazine. Jeff provided a few personal comments – he noted that Asia was half his age but she had seen coral reefs deteriorate in her lifetime. There is a shifting baseline syndrome – our idea of a pristine environment is what it was like when we were 10 years old. Jeff added since he was aged 10, 90% of the fish in our ocean has been lost. He added the reefs Asia knew as a girl were already deteriorating, and fish were depleted, but she will never know how it was before. Over 100 years ago, it was unthinkable for Darwin's bulldog for fish to be counted or fished out. Blue Planet 2 has had a deep impact on the way we regard the environment in the UK – Jeff would recommend watching this. Jeff added when it was clear CHOGM was going to endorse the Blue Charter, David Attenborough was approached to be an Ambassador for it however, and he had already been taken by the QCC.

The Commonwealth Blue Charter is based on three things:

1. Commonwealth countries have agreed for the first time to cooperate on ocean issues. There is only one ocean – 30% of land area globally is Commonwealth whilst 39% of oceans is Commonwealth.
2. The Blue Charter follows the Commonwealth Charter – it has good principles.
3. We have consulted extensively with countries. A Head of Government said they had never been as consulted on a CHOGM recommendation as this one – they were all on board with it. Jeff said it is the only CHOGM he has sat in with spontaneous applause.

The Blue Charter has eleven countries to lead on eight topic areas as Blue Charter Champions. Jeff added countries can step up at any time. The information is on the website. The action groups is where the RCS can take part, and this is what makes the Blue Charter different from any other international convention. Jeff added they do not tell governments what to do, but we operationalised how they could effectively make a difference. The Commonwealth gives us our mandate – governments are just telling us their priorities and providing their expertise. The Secretariat implements the Blue Charter.

Jeff added that they are trying to create a Blue Charter fund to facilitate the groups. Some action groups are led by rich countries, such as the UK on marine plastics together with Vanuatu - £7million. However, not all action points are as wealthy, so we would like to set up a fund to help these activities go further. Some governments have questioned this, but we just want to give even the small governments a chance to play.

Q&A session

Libby Ellis (Australia): asked whether there was a QCC commitment in South Australia. She added after the last International Meeting in 2016 they returned to Australia fired-up. They would now like to present this commitment for you to assess. Libby also said that South Australia would like to engage with both Jeff's and Asia's work in Australia.

- **Asia Williams:** We have two members in Australia – Canberra and Sydney. Asia offered to connect them with Libby.
- **Nathan McKenzie:** QCC proposals can be sent to the email address on the QCC website. They are all directed to Nathan from there.

Barbados: Asked Asia about those whose livelihoods depend on meat production?

- **Asia Williams:** meat consumption is interesting because governments do not address it however; it has been identified as having significant impact on climate change. Asia added as people's dietary choices change governments must accommodate for an industry shift. Asia also revealed that there has been a lot of push back from the meat industry.

Many trees not in reserves are being chopped down and replaced with Eucalyptus, which is not native – should the QCC not be looking at this?

- **Nathan McKenzie:** Yes the QCC only accredits sites which are indigenous. Nathan added that at this stage we do not see the QCC as being a lecturing authority. It is a voluntary commitment and requires a collaborative approach.

Climate change refugees. We have seen political and socio-refugees in recent years. Has there been any empirical research / evidence on climate change and the impact of refugees.

- **Jeff Ardron:** climate change refugees under current guidelines are not refugees so they do not have a place in the framework at the moment. This is a real problem. The Commonwealth has two of the lowest lying countries. This will affect the whole Commonwealth so the broader question is about how this will affect us all. Jeff added that the priority for small island working groups is sea level rise. It is not clear under current convention what happens if the water rises over the land. The country could lose their sovereign territory. Neighbouring countries could take in the highest rate of refugees but this needs to happen more at an international level.

Peter Mann (Asia): what can be done to police illegal foresting / logging etc.?

- **Nathan McKenzie:** the QCC has rejected nominations because all dedications should be free of controversy as they are in The Queen's name – it is the first environmental initiative she has ever given her name to and The Queen is engaged. She does read briefing notes.

Cheryll Belle (Barbados): What can be do about Sargasso? (Floating seaweed that has started to wash up in huge amounts on beaches and starts to smell and rot).

- **Jeff Ardron:** this seaweed floats on beaches in large quantities; it washes up and it starts to smell. It was first discovered by sailors sailing from the Americas to the North Caribbean who were becoming stuck in these massive clusters of seaweed. They then motored through it breaking the seaweed, which has then started floating. Winds and temperatures change regimes – changed the cycle of Sargasso, instead of ending up on the bottom of the sea, it floats in large quantities to the shore. Countries counting on tourism are affected.

Kate Williams (Barbados): 2 degree Celsius warming affects economies, because the land displacement causes loss of economic activity. For us, 1.5 is a matter of life or death.

- **Asia Williams:** small islands are at a disadvantage when negotiating this. Small countries wanted 1-degree threshold at Paris, but they did not have enough weight to convince others.

Isle of Man, Guernsey and Jersey: The QCC does not consider these overseas territories when taking commitments – are the voices of all in the Commonwealth being considered?

- **Nathan McKenzie:** we do include these dependencies and territories as part of the UK and you are welcome to contribute to the QCC. Nathan added we also do this for Australian territories.

Wednesday 17 October

Welcome: Dr Greg Munro

Greg started the day off by clarifying a few points regarding the alignment. Greg said that it is not a merger but an administrative alignment – we cannot merge the two organisations nor do we want to. CLGF is a company with limited guarantee. The RCS is a charity driven by volunteers and is civil society. Greg reiterated that these two organisations would retain their own identities, their own boards and their own brands. It is an administrative alignment – back office processes and a few shared staff (shared admin and finance staffing). Greg continued suggesting that in the future we could look at shared work streams – commonalities and linkages and that more organisations can work together for common purpose, the better the outcome.

Greg referred to the Royal Charter, Article 10 that outlined the Society's relationship with branches:

'Subject to such provision as may be made in the Rules, the Council may designate autonomous Commonwealth Societies and other organisations as affiliated to the Society, may provide for the charging of affiliation fees, and may, subject to decision by the Council under the Rules, discontinue such affiliation'.

Greg added that the RCS is the mothership based on these rules – the branches are the satellites. The Royal Charter governs the Royal Commonwealth Society. This does not mean we are the boss but it does mean we set the parameters. Greg continued to say that if any branch actively works against RCS work on inclusion this creates a red line. Greg reiterated that branches do not need to do the same work but they should not work against it. Greg added that the Council does not need to consult with branches for every single piece of work, as this would paralyse the RCS.

Greg said that he hoped delegates felt RCS staff were listening however, he added that we are only nine staff so we cannot always communicate as much and as quickly as people want. Greg acknowledged that the RCS needs to develop a more effective, streamlined communication process. He said that he would like to see the creation of a working group to address the challenges whilst also looking at how we can raise funds and run programmes together. Greg added that he expects it to take 18 months to where he would like to see the RCS.

Q&A session:

Geraldine Noel (Malta): Geraldine acknowledged that the Malta branch was unclear about the effects of the alignment. She thanked Greg for his comments and added that he has cleared up hers and the Malta committee's concerns.

Ottawa branch: would like to see a document outlining the alignment – what it is and what it is not. Ottawa would also like to hear more about the future of the Regional Co-ordinators role and if they are firmly involved in the future structure.

- **Greg Munro:** agreed that he would create and share a document on the alignment for branches. Greg also acknowledged the important role Regional Co-ordinators and Regional Youth Co-ordinators play. He drew comparison with CLGF, which has four Regional Co-ordinators adding that these are the only people he communicates with. Greg said that the Regional Co-ordinators need to stay in the architecture, that we need to discuss how this is going to work but that we are never going to be in a position to start paying Regional Co-ordinators.

Victoria Branch: suggested that branches contribute £1,000 each towards the creation of a new online platform for the essay competition and to update IT systems as this has been an ongoing problem now for four to five years.

Zasada (Canada): offered IT assistance.

Angela Jeune (Europe): thanked Greg for readjusting his speech this morning adding that he had addressed many concerns that came up in discussions the day before. She added that as a Regional Co-ordinator she had been pleased to meet so many branches at the meeting.

Greg Munro: we are looking for greater sustainability and connection with fundraisers.

- David Syrad: some companies in Japan may be interested in sponsorship as a gateway to the Commonwealth.

Judith Elson (Canada): asked what London does adding that it would be useful to have a quarterly overview of what Greg is doing – not necessarily in detail but a shareable version.

- **Greg Munro:** revealed that he does this for CLGF on a six monthly basis so it is definitely something that could be trialled for the RCS. With regard to what the RCS does Greg outlined the two strands:
 1. Programmes: youth; gender; inclusivity and environment
 2. Public Affairs and Engagement

Panel discussion: Maximising our engagement with Commonwealth citizens

Session 1: Contributing to Commonwealth Priorities and the 2030 UN Sustainable Development Goals

Colin Milner and Greg Munro

Colin Milner (Canberra): The ACT Branch in Canberra is well situated, it has access and contact with DFAT, High Commissioners and some very good universities, which have strong development and pacific islands focus. Colin added that this provides the branch with an opportunity to engage on development and cultural issues in pursuit of Commonwealth values.

Colin's main message to delegates was that we are a small group, but we do have a committed hard working core of people with relevant backgrounds. He said what we do is modest but encouraged all branches to think how their networks open up possibilities for them in this area. Colin provided a few examples:

- The Queen's Baton Relay – ACT engaged with an actor (Sean Murphy) who travelled with the baton. Colin added he runs a programme for children and is travelling around Commonwealth. He will next be in the Africa region. Colin welcomed interested branches to speak to him further about this.
- Another ACT member is very involved with the Institute for Economics and Peace (run by a billionaire tech entrepreneur).
- Charitable donations – each year ACT selects an independent, non-profit charity. Colin added that ACT has also received a bequest in a will, which he said has been very helpful. ACT has since established a committee and over the last few years, ACT has provided money to PhD research students perusing research in Commonwealth values.
- Commonwealth Day Celebration Committee: Colin noted that partnerships are essential

Greg Munro: the world has done a lot in terms of poverty relief but inequalities are not good for the world. The top portion of the world needs to give back – figures such as Buffet and Gates are doing this. Greg added that yesterday we heard Lucy Slack talk about the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and global development and how we missed the targets. In many countries, the MDGs were not achieved and in others, progress reversed. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) tried to approach global development a different way. The MDGs created by a group of people at the UN had no ownership at local level. The difference with the SDGs was that local people and governments would be involved in creation, delivery and evaluation. Greg added the SDGs could not be achieved unless the people are involved – it is not just an academic exercise.

What are the SDGs? Greg encouraged delegates to think of the Commonwealth values and RCS work. He said that the first is to achieve no poverty as hungry men and women do not care about the rest. Greg continued to say

that you need to adapt how you get involved with the SDGs in your area. He added that young people need to be involved as it is their future. Greg concluded by saying that values and the SDGs are much the same – if we do both that is how we will achieve a better world.

Cultural and community outreach activities

Libby Ellis and Shivani Wazir Pasrich

Shivani Wazir Pasrich (India): introduced herself as RCS India Regional Co-ordinator and founder of the Commonwealth Cultural Forum. She outlined how her work had centred on communications – as a TV presenter in the 1990s and featured in a Bollywood film in 1996 – she said that as a performer she has spent more than 1000 hours on television. Shivani continued to say that the power of culture could not be stressed enough and that she was delighted to hear Greg talk about values and the SDGs. Shivani added that during Tuesday’s regional breakout session she was pleased to hear that there will be a fashion show done using plastic. She added that another of the activities she runs is the Commonwealth Cricket Club stating that this brings the cause to the front – it lets people know what you are doing and it is moving around South Asia.

Libby Ellis (Australia): outlined how she had established a Chamber Orchestra to encourage Young Professionals to stay in South Australia and pursue their careers as musicians. Libby adding that they work with another organisation that she chairs called Co-opera, a touring opera company. The orchestra supports the opera. It is through this mechanism that they spread the RCS message and how it supports them. Libby added that the South Australia Branch also supports the plain English-speaking organisation and promotes The Queen’s Commonwealth Essay Competition in schools. Libby said that they have just established a new project, which she is very proud of – they have established a grant, which has been given to a Fijian student to finish his PhD in Adelaide (he works on the QCC site in Fiji). Libby added that together with other RCS branches they are working with the university to establish the first QCC site in South Australia. Libby suggested that if you are excited and talk to other people things will happen – your vested interests will be achieved if they are the same.

Case study: Community Engagement – Commonwealth Big Lunches

Peter Stewart MVO, Executive Director Outreach and Development, Eden Project and Lindsay Brummit

Peter Stewart MVO, Executive Director Outreach and Development, Eden Project

Peter began by providing background to the Eden Project, which it is an educational charity, which aims to connect people with each other to work towards a better future. Eden is a symbol of regeneration and a symbol of what people achieve together. Peter outlined how Eden receives 1million visitors a year but how that figure is not close to achieving their goal when there are 63million people in the UK and 2.4billion in the Commonwealth. Peter explained that this is why they are building elsewhere – a second transformation – taking the essence of bringing people together to see what can be achieved outside of the Cornish setting.

Peter explained that Eden believes we are dependent on strong and resilient communities. Eden’s aim in all its UK projects is to engage people and to improve their happiness and wellbeing. Peter added that connected communities are better placed to face change – there is strength in unity and that is what the Eden Project is all about.

Peter explained that Eden sow ideas and interest – they hope for community led action adding that he hopes we take this up. Peter said they do this by inviting people to have a good time. They do not tell people that by taking part it will make a real difference to society. He added this happens but they do not sell it as that idea.

Big Lunch – biggest small idea. As many people as possible sit-down and have lunch with their communities on the same weekend in June. Peter explained that this has grown over the years and the ambition is to one-day halt the country – the whole of the UK stops, the shops shut, for street parties. In turn, you get to know the people you are nearest to (your neighbours). Peter said that in the UK, 6 million people currently take part and that they hope to grow this to 20 million.

In 2016, the Eden Project did a study into the cost / impact of disconnected communities – this costs the UK £32 million a year in health, social and policing care. This is just another reason to hold a Big Lunch.

Another bi-product is that some people try to use the Big Lunch to raise funds for their communities. People in their communities raised £8million.

Peter explained that The Duchess of Cornwall came on board as their Patron. He added that with her support and the increased profile, they hope to work with HRH throughout the Commonwealth. Peter explained how they had been engaged in CHOGM pushing the Commonwealth Big Lunch – he acknowledged that at that point it was largely a ceremonial exercise but if it continued in the grassroots he asked what would Rwanda 2020 look like. Peter explained that they had carried out some research and found a [TED Talk: How to start a movement](#). The video shows the importance of nurturing your first few followers as equals. Peter said the biggest lesson is leadership is over glorified. The first gets all the credit, the first follower transforms the lone in to a leader. For everyone to be leaders, it is ineffective. Have the courage to follow and show others how to follow. Have the guts to be the first one to join in.

Peter compared this to the Commonwealth Big Lunch noting that the UK is not the leader. He added what they were starting to find with the Big Lunch is that a couple of countries stood up as first followers – Ghana. Lindsay explained what they found in Ghana was connectivity in communities was not an issue – the issue was school attendance. In Ghana, the Commonwealth Big Lunch therefore worked with a school. Look at the different aspects of your country and whether there are things that could be addressed through coming together.

Q&A session:

Libby Ellis (South Australia): revealed that they held a Commonwealth Big Lunch but did not know it was linked to the Eden Project.

Cheryll Belle (Barbados): added that Barbados also hosted a Commonwealth Big Lunch. Cheryll asked what materials were used to create the domes.

- Peter Stewart: a kind of plastic, plastic coating and three layers. These layers are filled with air and are supposed to last for 20 years.

Bristol: also held a Commonwealth Big Lunch with the university – over 300 people attended and signed up as new members.

- Peter Stewart: the Eden Project is not looking for recognition. We know that Commonwealth Day exists and my question to you is would you give some thought to this. Maybe through this you start to be able to tackle with a very light touch some of the issues in your community.

Reflections on the week – open to floor

Jenny Stodola (Canada): expressed her thanks to all. She said that the youth day was invigorating and there were a number of innovative solutions to engaging with branches. Jenny signposted delegates to a series of workshops run by the UN on how to engage with the SDGs – she stressed to delegates that they may have young people in their network that have been trained in how to action these goals and may be able to provide branches with training. Jenny encouraged branches to tap into resources. She also encouraged other youth delegates to speak up as we have not heard enough from them.

Eleanor Ryan (Canada): agreed with Jenny's reflections. She added that she attended two years ago and the change from last time to this meeting is phenomenal – she said she is unsure how many people went to both but thinks delegates will agree discussions have been much more open and transparent.

Blackson (Nigeria): commended the London team. He added that he has attended many International Meetings (Ghana in 2004, London in 2006 etc.) but that the standard has really improved. He added that with regard to the SDGs and Nigeria poverty and unemployment are the big challenges.

Associate Fellow (Pakistan): had not heard of the RCS before attending this meeting but now has a very good idea of what it is and does. He added there is much we can do for the world to help improve it.

Joe Zasada (Canada): thanked the RCS for an excellent conference. He said he hoped the positive feeling and tone would continue under Dr Munro's leadership.

Anna Louise Leyden (UK): thanked the team. Noted the improvement from last time as not all youth were invited to take part in the meeting. She added that it has been invaluable to Associate Fellows. Anna would like to remind all delegates that we are here and we do want to help.

Colin Milner (Canberra): noted that the meeting had been very helpful. He thanked Greg and colleagues. He acknowledged that he knows the RCS staff are hard pressed but that we have strong representation from our global network. He added that many people have travelled to London at considerable expense but they are here because they are committed to the RCS and the Commonwealth. Colin added there would be a desire in his branch and others for a substantial outcomes document.

Presley (Kenya): said that as an Associate Fellow he has found the meeting inspiring and an educative session hearing from branches from across the Commonwealth.

Luke Battcock (Canada): noted the paradigm shift in the way we regard youth – including through the regional breakout sessions. Luke reflected that youth are very powerful and stressed the need to engage with communities.

Judy Clarke (Adelaide): would like to see follow-up on the concept Canada brought forward about an internet forum for branches to communicate.

- Canada confirmed they would do this.

Victor Ndede (Kenya): thanked the team adding that the information gathered from the programme has provided valuable inputs that can be integrated through our branches. Requested a formal communique.

Godfrey Hall (Bath): thanked organisers. Godfrey said that he had been a member for a long time and that the one problem from the perspective of the Bath Branch is clarification on the role of the RCS, its aims and objectives. Godfrey noted that he had received clarity on this especially with regard to the relationship between London and the branches.

Kaye Williams (Barbados): reiterates the need for an internet forum for branches limited to members only with a noticeboard to drop-in information. Kaye added that this would ease engagement.

Tom Sears (Canada): thanks RCS staff. He noted what RCS lack in money they make up for in hard work. He stressed however that finances are going to have to be a focus moving forwards and suggested branches lobby governments for funding.

Dawn Tindall (Guernsey): said that she had learnt so much and felt there was a fantastic, community feeling.

Cheryll Belle (Barbados): Thanks RCS and gives Greg her full support. She said that the meeting had provided her with the opportunity to meet colleagues from all regions. Cheryll extended an invitation to all to visit Barbados. Cheryll thanked Hilary Greengrass for all her support over the years.

Amy Durrant (UK): thanked RCS on behalf of herself and all Associate Fellows.

Helen Jones (RCS London): noted that it had been a wonderful four days – with the youth day kicking it all off. She said that we have shared some thoughts for the future and this is what is so important – is that we are future facing. She noted that there was now much more clarity about what the overall vision is for the RCS as an international organisation and international family. Helen added that RCS staff have learn a tremendous amount over the last few days.

Greg Munro: Thanked delegates for their thanks and feedback. Greg said what we should take away is that we are a family that can learn from each other – branches, London and Associate Fellows. Greg added there is a comment that we need to remember – diaspora communities are often forgotten and they are keen to be engaged – we must remember that. It is very important. Greg added that there is one important message – in order to make the world a better place and solve problems there is no single solution. It is about join action, community, and civil society.

Greg noted the positive feedback on the agenda. He said that it had been a tangible, meaningful, action-orientated agenda. Greg noted the importance of inter-generational dialogue and said that one of the greatest groups of all are the elders who can guide the world with their wisdom and knowledge – it is important to remember that. It is not just young people – there are different dynamics.

Greg added that communication is the clear priority and that this message is clear. Greg said the RCS will produce a substantial report – something that is meaningful. Greg acknowledged that the internet forum is a good idea as is the suggestion for centres of excellence – development of a fundraising strategy been the most urgent.

Greg said that we need a smaller working group = perhaps of Regional Co-ordinators and Regional Youth Co-ordinators to help frame the architecture moving forward.

Greg ended by saying that he will look to meet with branches when travelling.

Looking Ahead to IM 2020

Greg opened the floor asking for nominations from branches to host the next International Meeting noting the timing of the 2020 CHOGM (which may move but likely to be October). Greg said that he would like to develop criteria against which to allocate the next host.

Toronto 2020

Jenny Stodola (Americas) presented on behalf of the Chair of the Toronto Branch who was unable to attend.

- Toronto (often called the Centre of Canada) is a huge metropolitan area
- Toronto is home to a large Commonwealth diaspora
- Toronto is a flight hub
- Suggested another Canadian branch might like to organise a Model CHOGM as a side event.

Cyprus 2020

Anna (Cyprus) introduced the Cyprus branch. She said that in the last year they have held an event every month. These have included a visit from Prince Michael of Kent and hosting a forum for 40 delegates of the National Liberal Club. Anna said that they would capitalise on existing experience. They would want to host a meeting that was forward looking and creative. She said that the Cyprus Branch aspire to act as a bridge between East and West – both geographically and culturally.

- Well connected to major flight hubs
- Based at the University of Nicosia – largest in Cyprus – 12,000 students providing direct access to a large pool of youth who we may want to involve in the meeting as part of their engagement with young people.

- Proposed time: June 2020 – Queen’s Birthday; good weather wise; after student’s exams so they can contribute to organising the meeting.
- Existing special rate agreements with various hotels in the city.
- Small Island so easy to travel around.
- Suggested format – similar to 2018 with a side-event such as a field trip to the outskirts of Nicosia

Anna pledged for the next International Meeting to deliver a digital platform for the RCS with the support of the university.

Pakistan 2020: Previously expressed interest. To send their proposal separately to RCS

Cayman Islands: offered to host.

Eleanor Ryan (Canada): noted that limited resources in London was a recurring theme. She suggested that branches should consider a modest registration contribution of even £25

Farewell: Her Excellency the High Commissioner for South Africa

The High Commissioner said it had been a privilege and a pleasure to host the Society’s International Meeting at South Africa House and that they consider it an honour to have been asked. Her Excellency added that in the Society’s 150th year, it has also been an honour given the key focus you have in such important themes that we also have in South Africa. Young people make up 41% of South Africa’s population and 31% are between the ages of 15 and 35 – the High Commission was therefore keen to be involved given South Africa’s focus on youth development. The High Commissioner noted youth development is key to the social, economic and political progress of South Africa. She added that their national youth policy focuses on increasing the economic participation in the economy, education, health and in combatting substance abuse, the role of nation building and improving responsiveness. The High Commissioner concluded by saying that the IM2018 resonate with South Africa’s experience and that is what the Commonwealth is all about.

Closing Address: Dr Linda Yueh

Linda provided a few remarks – she said that she felt immensely privileged for the dedication and commitment shown by attending delegates. She noted that many had travelled at their own expense. Linda thanked delegates for their humbling and inspiring discussions. She said that the diversity existent in this room is something to behold and worth celebrating in our 150th year. She noted that the discussion has shown how as a Society we can best support the people we are working for and that there is a feeling of overwhelming optimism and opportunity. Linda noted that people had got to know each other better – she had seen lots of discussion. She said that her own brief encounters had been inspiring and insightful and we have all forged long-term relationships. Linda emphasised whilst there are considerable challenges to face there are also opportunities to engage with each other in a consistent and strategic way. Linda added that she has every confidence in the London team to put in place the various structures and desired communications.

Linda thanked the Regional Co-ordinators and Regional Youth Co-ordinators for their role and their willingness to work with us to strengthen efforts.

She said it is important to remember that the Commonwealth is #OurCommonwealth and that whilst it is made up of 53 nations it is up to us to promote, share and live these values. Linda stressed that many people do not know what it means to belong to the ‘mother of all networks’ but it is about recognising volunteerism, promoting the essay competition, the plastic campaign – all key opportunities to strengthen links made and to find practical solutions to overcoming long distances.

Linda said that as we look forward to CHOGM 2020 and IM 2020, we must strive to be a collective, to represent what the Commonwealth represents and its values – our values. Linda concluded by thanking Greg and the team for an amazing job. She ended by saying what had convinced her to take over, as Chair was the London team.