

VOICES

2020 ESSAY COMPETITION LAUNCHED IN NEW ZEALAND



MOOMIN

THE QUEEN'S COMMONWEALTH ESSAY COMPETITION SUPPORTED BY NEW SPONSOR MOOMIN CHARACTERS LTD.

Stories change the world

The Moomin stories have resonated across borders and cultures for decades, and the original Moomin books have been translated into more than 50 languages, and are still widely in print. Well received by everybody, these stories tell children about friendship, love and tolerance, and engage adults in a world deeply rooted in humanistic values.

Though published as children's stories, the Moomin books are imbued with a philosophy of life that touches us on both an individual and a universal level.

MOOMIN on a quest to save the sea

Moomin Characters Ltd, the family company looking after Tove Jansson's legacy, wants to encourage young children and teenagers to use their pen and their voice to make the world a better place. The passion and intelligence of young people will be crucial in tackling the climate crisis affecting their future.

In celebration of the Moomin 75 anniversary, the company has recently also announced its #OURSEA campaign, which aims to protect the Baltic Sea and its cultural heritage. More information: www.oursea.fi

Moomin Characters is the new principal sponsor of The Queen's Commonwealth Essay Competition.

Tove Jansson

75 years ago in 1945, just after the Second World War, a small Finnish woman used her pen to change the world. She created a place that was loving and tolerant for beings of different kinds, and where doors were left open for visitors.

This place is called Moominvalley, inhabited by the Moomins, a family of friendly, brave trolls who live an adventurous life in harmony with nature. The Moomins are the central characters in a series of books and a comic strip created by the artist, illustrator and author Tove Jansson.



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WELCOME



As 2019 draws to a close and we look towards the new year, I am delighted to share with you the Society's strategic focus for the next five years, which will form the basis of a new strategic plan that will be launched in 2020.

Over 151 years, the Society has established a respected reputation as a trusted Commonwealth convenor, known for our youth focus and high-level advocacy. This reputation will be focused in the coming years to deliver in four impactful areas: literacy, equality and inclusion, the environment and connected communities.

We will begin by harnessing the increasing profile of The Queen's Commonwealth Essay Competition and launching an ambitious literacy programme that will contribute to eradicating illiteracy in the Commonwealth.

Building on our work as a member of the Equality and Justice Alliance, we will continue working with partners to ensure that discriminatory laws are changed so that everyone is treated fairly before the law.

Our efforts to protect the environment will increase as we work with our partners in The Queen's Commonwealth Canopy to launch the next phase of this visionary environmental programme, the first in The Queen's name.

We will continue to deliver highlights in the Commonwealth calendar, notably the Commonwealth Service at Westminster Abbey and the High Commissioners' Banquet, to bring communities together.

Finally, we are delighted to be contributing to the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in Kigali, Rwanda in June 2020.

So, it's a new strategy for a new year. We have an ambitious but focused plan for the next five years and we very much welcome partners to work with us to deliver benefits for the citizens of the Commonwealth.

Season's greetings.

Dr Linda Yueh
Chair



THE ROYAL COMMONWEALTH SOCIETY

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OUR VISION IN ACTION

For 151 years, the Society has established a respected reputation as a trusted Commonwealth convener, known for our youth focus and high-level advocacy. This reputation will be focused over the next five years in four impactful areas: connected communities, equality and inclusion, literacy and the environment. Youth champions from across the Commonwealth say why these areas are important.



**Rebecca Wembri,
Papua New Guinea**

Better Connected Communities

Rebecca is a UK civil servant who supports the Society as a volunteer. She was born in Papua New Guinea and has roots in the UK and Australia.

“For many, the feeling of being connected to a wider Commonwealth community comes later in life. In my case, this started at the tender age of three when I first moved from Papua New Guinea (PNG) to the UK and I saw the PNG Flag fluttering on the Mall. The sense of belonging to a wider community has stayed with me throughout my own family’s journey between continents, migrating between the UK, PNG and Australia. In all these places, I have built connections with people from across the Commonwealth, drawn together by our shared history, culture, values and

visions for the future. This familiarity also drew me to the Royal Commonwealth Society, where I have seen how Commonwealth communities can work together both locally and on the international stage and have been fortunate to celebrate the diversity of the Commonwealth as a flag bearer and volunteer at the Commonwealth Service. Throughout my personal life and my engagement with the Commonwealth through the Society, I have always been reminded of the ability of the Commonwealth to bring people together. On a personal level, this has brought me new life experiences and friendships, and for the Commonwealth community, I have seen how networks that have been built, and continue to be built, have the power to bring positive change.”



**Olaoluwa Abagun,
Nigeria**

Equality and Inclusion for a Common Future

Olaoluwa is a Lawyer and Founder of Girl Pride Circle – a girls’ rights advocacy NGO in Nigeria. She is the Co-ordinator of the Commonwealth Youth Gender & Equality Network (CYGEN) and an Associate Fellow of the Royal Commonwealth Society,

“More than ever, Commonwealth youth are raising their voices, challenging status quo and mobilising for change. From social media campaigning to grassroots advocacy, we continue to stand against the discrimination and exclusion of women, girls, and sexual and gender minorities across social, economic and political spaces. Through our resilience and expertise, we have kept the spotlight

on equality and inclusion – both as a goal itself and as a pathway to a common future.

With our membership across 40 countries and all regions of the Commonwealth, the Commonwealth Youth Gender & Equality Network (CYGEN) is a melting pot of youth-led efforts in the fight for a fairer and more equal Commonwealth. As Commonwealth youth with a shared vision, we have come together in the lead up to CHOGM 2020 to create a campaign, calling on our governments to change discriminatory laws that have held us back. Beyond the campaign, we will continue to amplify our voices to advance the rights of all and to create a gender just Commonwealth.”



**Katherine
McIndoe,
New Zealand**

Championing Literacy

Katherine is from Wellington, New Zealand, and won the Commonwealth Essay Competition in 2013 while studying at Victoria University of Wellington. She now lives in London and is studying towards an Artist Diploma in Opera at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama. She was a judge for the Junior Essay Competition in 2018.

“I entered the Commonwealth Essay Competition in 2013 (renamed The Queen’s Commonwealth Essay Competition in 2015) because I had something that I wanted to write about, but I didn’t know how to start. The Competition provided the perfect impetus to get my thoughts in order and tackle a written piece, giving me a jumping-off point to explore something that I was passionate about. Winning the Competition was an incredible and unexpected thing

to happen, but the chance to express a point-of-view, and have that read by different people around the world, is a powerful opportunity in itself. This was brought home to me even more last year when I was a judge for the Junior Competition. Reading entries from around the Commonwealth, encompassing so many different ideas, reminded me that writing is a universal way to creatively express your identity, and contribute your voice to a wider conversation. It is easy for young people to feel that their voice is too small to be heard, but there is such value in sharing your perspective through writing, especially when it can then be amplified by a competition like this. Any opportunity to communicate across cultures and borders is powerful, and I would encourage anyone thinking of entering the Competition to take up that opportunity.”



**Angelique
Pouponneau,
Seychelles**

The Need to Protect the Environment

Angelique, is a Seychellois youth and advocates for taking urgent action against climate change. She is Chief Executive Officer of the Seychelles’ Conservation and Climate Adaption Trust, an Associate Fellow of the Royal Commonwealth Society and was a Fellow of the Alliance of Small Island Developing States.

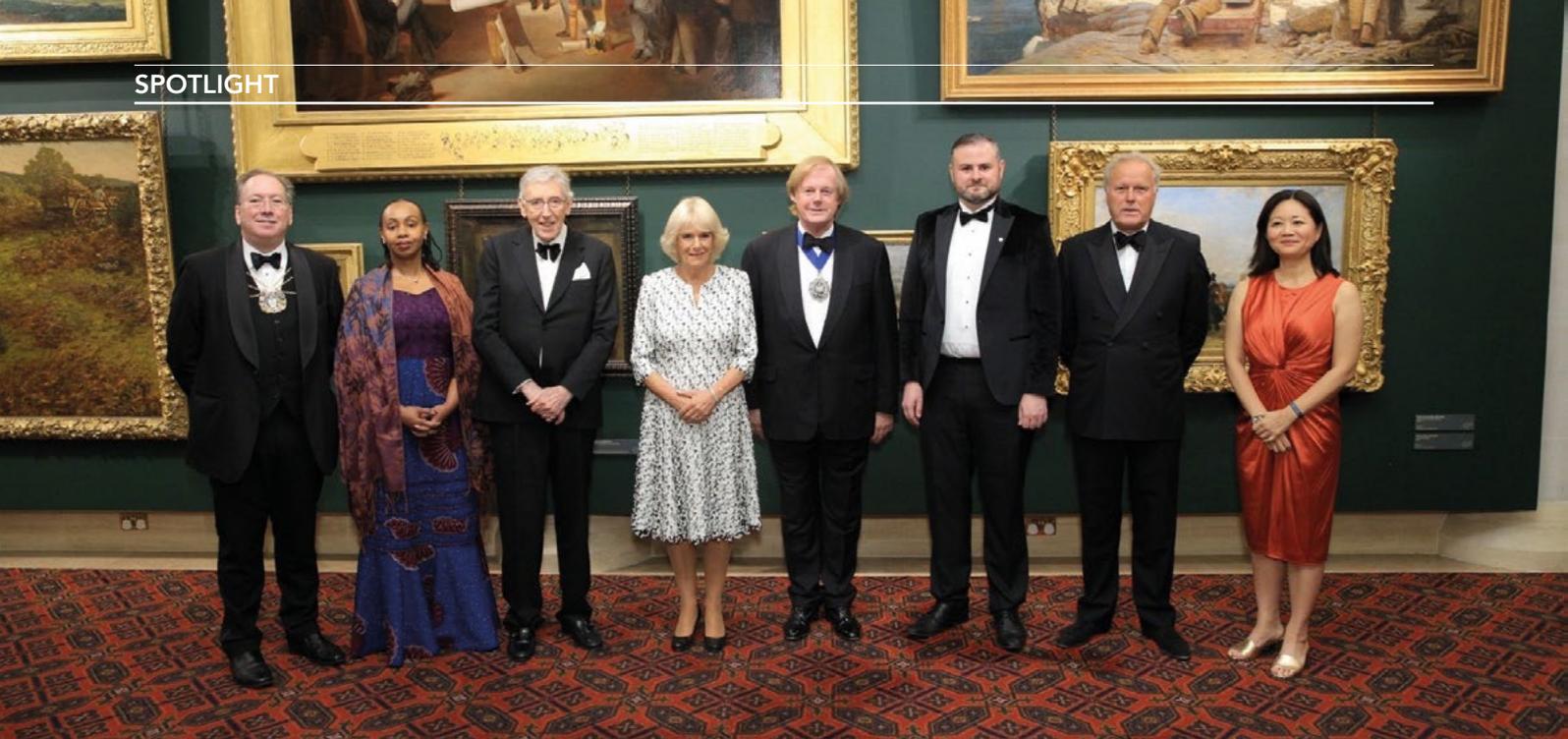
“How many Commonwealth Member States are we willing to sacrifice? The majority of countries in the Commonwealth are island nations, and with the impact of the effects of climate change, their existence and sovereignty come into question. 2019, brought Hurricane to the Caribbean, that ravaged The Bahamas leaving 50 people dead, more than a thousand people missing and a whole country to re-build. With a warming ocean, the frequency and intensity of these extreme weather events increases,

setting us on the course for a new normal where people live in fear of the next “Category Hell.”

So, what are we doing about it? The global temperature goal is to keep temperature increases to below 1.5 degrees celsius. The Commonwealth Charter points to the need to protect the environment, “in particular, by addressing the adaptation and mitigation challenges of climate change.” However, we find that international policymaking is disconnected from the realities on the ground, and countries negotiating in line with groups based on geography or commonalities isolating those with differences and placing the shared values of our Commonwealth on the back burner. The convening power of the Commonwealth requires it to play a critical role in bridging gaps and saving islands.”

MORE INFORMATION

Discover more about how the Society is making an impact in these four areas by visiting our website www.thercs.org



HIGH COMMISSIONERS' BANQUET

On Wednesday, 16 October 2019, the Royal Commonwealth Society and the City of London Corporation in association with the Commonwealth Enterprise and Investment Council (CWEIC), held the High Commissioners' Banquet at Guildhall.

For 2019, we were honoured to welcome our Vice-Patron, HRH The Duchess of Cornwall, to the reception of the event. Her Royal Highness was joined by the Commonwealth's London-based diplomatic representatives and UK and Commonwealth thought and business leaders. The event acts as a seminal moment to raise the profile of the Commonwealth and to address the challenges facing its 53 member states and over 2.4 billion people.

During the reception guests heard from Chair of the Royal Commonwealth Society, Dr Linda Yueh, Chairman of the CWEIC, Lord Marland, and Alderman Sir David Wooton, Lord Mayor Locum Tenens.

As the UK enters its last few months as Chair-in-Office of the Commonwealth, and as focus turns to the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM)

in Kigali in June 2020, the occasion provided an opportunity to consider priorities for CHOGM and the Commonwealth Business Forum that will form part of the week's activities.

Keynote speakers for the evening included UK Minister of State for Africa, Mr Andrew Stephenson MP, and Her Excellency Ms Yamina Karitanyi, High Commissioner for Rwanda. Minister Stephenson reflected on the UK's time as Chair-in-Office, noting that the Commonwealth has united to confront the challenges facing the world, including through the Commonwealth Clean Ocean Alliance and by protecting Commonwealth businesses from cyber threats. The Minister also took the opportunity to look to the future, highlighting the need to work together to tackle climate change and to promote inclusive prosperity, setting an aim of increasing the value of trade between Commonwealth Member States to £2 trillion by 2030.

The sentiments expressed in Minister Stephenson's speech were shared by the High Commissioner for Rwanda, who discussed Rwanda's ambitions for CHOGM 2020. Her Excellency expressed Rwanda's intention to focus on the issues of digital trade and digital transformation, as part of a broader effort to promote global growth, job creation and the sharing of best practices amongst members.

 **MORE INFORMATION**
www.thercs.org

↑ HRH The Duchess of Cornwall meets with Commonwealth dignitaries and the evening's speakers
Photo: Gerald Sharp

CHOGM 2020

THEME ANNOUNCED

In 2020, Commonwealth leaders will convene in Kigali under the overarching theme **'Delivering a Common Future: Connecting, Innovating, Transforming'**, building on CHOGM 2018 outcomes, which were inspired by the theme 'Towards a Common Future'.



The next Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM), to be held in Kigali, Rwanda in June 2020, was officially launched in a video message from the President of Rwanda and the Commonwealth Secretary-General at the United Nations General Assembly in September.

“*The distinctive aspect of CHOGM 2020 will be connectivity, including what young people can do with technology to create vibrant societies and develop our economies.***”** **President Kagame**

The theme for the meeting will be 'Delivering A Common Future: Connecting, Innovating, Transforming'. Five sub-themes have also been identified for discussion: Governance and Rule of Law, ICT and Innovation, Youth, Environment, and Trade.

The meeting will aim to build on progress since CHOGM 2018 in London and the theme of the United Kingdom's (UK) period as Chair-in-Office of the Commonwealth, 'Towards A Common Future'. CHOGM 2020 also marks exactly ten years to the 2030 deadline set for delivering the agenda for the internationally agreed Sustainable Development Goals. Commonwealth leaders are therefore expected to discuss ways in which the Commonwealth, with its network of over 80 organisations, can connect and innovate to help transform societies, in accordance with the Commonwealth Charter values of democracy, multilateralism,

sustainable development, the empowerment of women and youth and protecting the environment. The meeting will also place a strong emphasis on delivering achievable, comprehensive, meaningful and powerful initiatives that effect change and implement the CHOGM 2018 agenda.

Speaking at the High Commissioners' Banquet at Guildhall, London in October, H.E. Ms Yamina Karitanyi, High Commissioner for the Republic of Rwanda in the UK, discussed the importance of bringing a new energy and focus in responding to the needs of the Commonwealth's 2.4 billion citizens. Her Excellency made particular mention of the Commonwealth Connectivity Agenda for Trade and Investment, noting the sub-themes of Youth and ICT and Innovation at the upcoming meeting. Indeed, on announcing the theme President Kagame said that:

"The distinctive aspect of CHOGM 2020 will be connectivity, including what young people can do with technology to create vibrant societies and develop our economies."

The meeting will be held at the Kigali Convention Centre during the week starting 22 June and will see Rwanda play host to women, young people, businesses, non-governmental organisations and ministers and leaders from all 53 Commonwealth countries.

Having set the stage for CHOGM, Rwanda's term as Chair-in-Office looks to bring more opportunities for the Commonwealth to discuss and debate the key issues it is facing today.

 **MORE INFORMATION**
www.chogm2020.rw



CONNECTING THROUGH CREATIVE WRITING

In October, the Winners and Runners-up of The Queen’s Commonwealth Essay Competition 2019 were brought to London for a programme of cultural and educational activities, designed to highlight the range of opportunities and industries to which creative writing can open the door.

The following day, the winners recorded their essays at BBC Broadcasting House, took part in a tour of the Houses of Parliament, and visited the High Commission for Canada – with its stunning roof terrace overlooking Trafalgar Square. This engagement provided a unique opportunity for the young people to speak about important global issues with high-level decision-makers including on the theme of The Queens Commonwealth Essay Competition 2020 – ‘Climate Action and the Commonwealth’. The High Commissioner, H.E. Mrs Janice Charrette, applauded the message of Senior Winner, Catherine Wang’s entry, ‘Beached’ – that young people have a vital role to play in tackling climate change.



THE QUEEN'S
COMMONWEALTH ESSAY
COMPETITION 2019

Winners’ Week began with a visit to the High Commission for Ghana in the United Kingdom. The High Commissioner, H.E. Papa Owusu-Ankomah congratulated the Winners on their outstanding achievement and expressed how much he enjoyed reading Junior Runner-up, Elise Jensen’s poem, which is a celebration of Ghana’s culture. The winners then took part in a workshop and tour of Shakespeare’s Globe Theatre and were even given the opportunity to walk on the stage! Since all of our Winners this year were female, the practitioner asked them to consider the role of gender in Shakespeare’s work, posing questions on the paradox of including strong female characters in many of Shakespeare’s plays, given that those characters would have been played by men. This topic served to echo our Senior Runner-up’s winning entry, which considered gender inequality across the Commonwealth.

On Wednesday morning, the Winners attended a creative writing workshop with Daljit Nagra, poet and Fellow at the Royal Society of Literature (RSL). Daljit encouraged our Winners to reflect on their personal histories and produce a piece memorialising a place that was important to them. Listening to our Winners compare their diverse life experiences brought to the fore the value of the Competition – to allow young minds from across the Commonwealth to connect through their creativity. Our Winners were awestruck by

↑ Winners record their essays at Broadcasting House with the BBC World Service Outlook programme

the RSL's special collection of signatures and pens from their acclaimed Fellows, these included Charles Dickens, George Elliot, T.S. Elliot and Lord Byron. In the afternoon, the Winners were given the opportunity to be inspired by others their age by attending a matinee performance of 'Matilda' at the Cambridge Theatre. Witnessing the talent of Tilly-Raye Baker and Tom Brown, who played Matilda and Bruce, served as another reminder of what can result when young people are given the opportunity to pursue their passions. They also had the chance to go backstage and meet the cast!

Thursday began with a fascinating tour of Westminster Abbey. Our guide showed us Poet's Corner, the grave of the Unknown Warrior and memorials to Kings, Queens and celebrated scientists including Sir Isaac Newton, Charles Darwin, and Professor Stephen Hawking. Our guide also drew attention to more controversial figures recognised there, outlining the importance of creating a space for dialogue around challenging historical legacies. Afterwards we were treated to a delicious lunch at the High Commission for the Republic of Singapore where the Deputy High Commissioner, Ms Rozana Majid, commended Junior Winner Victoria Shen's outstanding poem.

The Awards Ceremony at Buckingham Palace was the highlight of a marvellous week. This was a once in a lifetime experience for the Winners, who had the honour of meeting with the Society's Vice-Patron, HRH The Duchess of Cornwall and hearing extracts from their entries read by renowned authors Ben Okri, Evie Wyld, Theresa Lola and Geri Horner. The Awards Ceremony also provided an opportunity to celebrate the work of Kieran Shafritz de Zoysa, a second Junior Runner-up, who was tragically killed in the bombings in Colombo, Sri Lanka on Easter Sunday. His piece was read by acclaimed author William Boyd CBE.

Winners' Week concluded with a magical tour of the Harry Potter Studios at Warner Bros in Levesden. This tour was of more relevance to the Commonwealth than you might assume – the Australian High Commission in London was used as the original set for Gringotts Bank in 'Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone'!

The Society is grateful to the office of HRH The Duchess of Cornwall and everyone who so warmly welcomed and celebrated the Winners. We would like to thank the Association of Commonwealth Universities for its generous support of Winners' Week and the Royal Over-Seas League for hosting the Winners. Finally, a special thank you to all the amazing teachers, entrants and judges who help make this unique and highly regarded competition a success year after year.

↓ Winners visit Harry Potter WB Studios

↓↓ Winners view the RSL rollbook



MEET THE WINNERS

SENIOR
WINNER



Catherine Wang

Age 15, Canada

Catherine's poem 'Beached' follows the heart-breaking experience of three passers-by as they find a whale washed up on a beach. Through vivid, lyrical descriptions, she underlines the importance of working together to address environmental damage and highlights the role of young people in accelerating climate action; with the young character as the catalysing force for returning the whale to the ocean. On being told that she was the 2019 Senior Winner, Catherine said "it was pure excitement."

JUNIOR
WINNER



Veronica Shen

Age 13, Singapore

Veronica's poem 'Lost' tells the story of a girl growing up in China exploring a complicated relationship with the country's past. For Veronica, this is a very personal topic as it is based in testimony from her grandmother who lived through the Cultural Revolution. Veronica chose to write on the topic 'My Cultural Connections' because she "wished to express [her] own feelings...and present an issue while developing the art of writing."

SENIOR
RUNNER-UP



Nnemdi Ozoemena

Age 17, Nigeria

Nnemdi's piece 'Hello' is a tale of two young people struggling with issues in their society, told through direct messages on Twitter. The characters do not feel truly appreciated for who they are, but find common ground and become friends. On being named Senior Runner-up, Nnemdi said "It feels really good to know that my portrayal of issues that I view as important was able to come through to people and hopefully make them feel something."

JUNIOR
RUNNER-UP



Elise Jensen

Age 12, Ghana

Elise's poem 'Ghana My Motherland' is a vibrant celebration of her favourite elements of Ghanaian culture; a welcoming tale of food, dancing, clothing and the ties she feels to the country. Dr Diana Owen OBE, Chair of the Junior Final Panel, said of Elise's poem, 'A heartfelt hymn to Ghana; lively, bright, optimistic, playful and confident.' Upon learning she was Junior Runner-up, Elise felt 'surprised and very excited!'

JUNIOR
RUNNER-UP



Kieran Shafritz de Zoysa

Age 11, Sri Lanka

Kieran's piece, titled 'My Cultural Connections', brings to life the streets of Sri Lanka and details his personal cultural journey of moving to the country. Kieran's piece was entered posthumously as he was tragically killed in the Easter Sunday bombings in Colombo this year. Gyles Brandreth, compère at this year's Awards Ceremony, remarked that Kieran was a bright and optimistic young boy and, in his honour, guests cheered and applauded. Our thoughts are with Kieran's family and friends.

 **MORE INFORMATION** www.thercs.org/competition

CLIMATE ACTION & THE COMMONWEALTH

On Friday, 22 November 2019, Her Royal Highness The Duchess of Cornwall, Vice-Patron of the Royal Commonwealth Society, launched The Queen's Commonwealth Essay Competition 2020 at Tūranga library in Christchurch, New Zealand.

On the theme 'Climate Action and the Commonwealth', The Queen's Commonwealth Essay Competition encourages young writers from across the globe to explore the many facets of this critical issue, which will dramatically shape the future of the Commonwealth's 1.4 billion citizens under the age of 30.

Drawing on the urgency of the ongoing climate crisis and increasing youth movement across the Commonwealth, young people are called upon to consider their position and power in bringing about change and how the Commonwealth can be used as a tool for positive action.

The theme was announced during an assembly of local schoolchildren who were taking part in a writing workshop at the library involving local authors,

Photo: © British High Commission Wellington



educators and New Zealand's Poet Laureate, David Eggleton. During the assembly, The Duchess also took the opportunity to present a number of certificates to Gold and Silver awardees from the 2019 Competition.

Reflecting on the importance of the Competition New Zealand's Poet Laureate, David Eggleton said:

"The Queen's Commonwealth Essay Competition is important because it nurtures and supports the writing aspirations of school children across the diversity of the Commonwealth. It encourages them to reflect on contemporary issues and how they are personally affected by them, and how they might express that through the creative use of words and the English language. The Essay is an emblem of the unity of young people at a time of many global conflicts and dilemmas. Let their imaginations take flight and may they discover and celebrate their own freewheeling exuberance as writers!"

The Society is pleased to announce Moomin Characters as the principal sponsor of the The Queen's Commonwealth Essay Competition 2020. Moomin Characters has a long history of championing causes that align with the Commonwealth values of friendship, tolerance, open-mindedness, respect for nature and the power of storytelling.

For 2020, the Society wishes to hear from all young people across the Commonwealth, regardless of religion, education or background. All stories and voices are important.

MORE INFORMATION

Full details, supporting resources and terms and conditions can be found at www.thercs.org/competition

FIRST DESCENT

Life on earth depends on a healthy ocean, and yet it is also the least known part of our planet, its final unknown frontier. **Oliver Steeds**, Nekton Founder and Mission Director tells us how our ocean is under threat. Human activity is damaging the ocean's ability to support life. The changing ocean affects our climate, our food security, our livelihoods, our homes, our natural resources and even the very air we breathe.



NEKTON

Whilst working as an investigative journalist some years ago I was sent to a Marine Protected Area off the Isle of Arran to see the damage done by trawling. The protected area was teeming with life and diversity and outside the protected area it was decimated. I saw clearly that marine reserves work. They are a proven way to build resilience against the effects of climate change, conserve marine life and ecosystems, enhance fisheries and food security and deliver sustainable economic growth. Scientific consensus calls for strongly protecting at least 30% of the ocean with marine reserves by 2030.

In 2015, I set up Nekton, an Oxford based independent not-for-profit research institute, to accelerate our scientific understanding and conservation of the ocean. It was clear to me that to be able to protect something you need to know about it. Our core belief is that our client is the ocean and so we only work with and on behalf of island and coastal nations committed to accelerating ocean conservation. It is vital to put the nations most affected by this ocean crisis at the forefront of change. Without their

commitment, the goals of 30% protection by 2030 cannot be achieved. We simply provide the support to allow them to make these important commitments.

First Descent: Indian Ocean is a series of pioneering missions undertaken by Nekton in partnership with governments in the Indian Ocean region to catalyse 30% protection of its waters by 2030. The Indian Ocean is the least protected and most endangered of the world's oceans. It counts for 20% of the world's ocean surface. Already home to nearly 2.7 billion people with an average age of under 30, by 2050, the Indian Ocean will be home to half the world's population. It is warming faster than any other ocean on the planet.

Each mission combines national commitments to ocean protection, marine spatial planning, applied research to inform ocean policy, investments in capacity development and inspirational communications to strengthen public support for political action.

Seychelles was our first Indian Ocean partner – a beacon and bellwether for ocean conservation and the sustainable development of the blue economy, it was the first country in

the Indian Ocean committed to protecting 30% of their ocean territory – an area twice the size of the UK. In March this year, a team of 60 scientists, crew, media, technicians and submersible pilots were

at sea for 50 days in Seychelles in March and April 2019. Applied research was at the heart of our mission – very little was known below 30 meters of the waters in Seychelles. The mission provided a biological and chemical health check of the ocean, as well as mapping the sea floor.

We used state-of-the-art technology combining divers, submersibles and Remotely Operated Vehicles (ROVs), all working in unison to undertake research down to 500metres for the very first time in these waters. On every deep dive, we were the first to witness and explore these

unknown depths. It took 12 different technology partners with a further 18 providing support to carry out this mission. 21 cutting edge technologies were developed for the mission. 20TB of data was collected.

Ocean awareness is at the very heart of our mission. Associated Press and Sky News were the communications partners. The transparent spherical pressure spheres of the two submersibles enabled people to witness people in the deep. An underwater transmission system was developed to enable the world's first live subsea broadcasts. The President of Seychelles gave a live subsea presidential address, becoming the world's most watched news story that day. Our other firsts included live subsea news bulletins, a three part live subsea documentary series, and an educational broadcast between school children and submersible pilots. In all the mission reached a global audience of 3.5 billion.

Underpinning all of our work is investment into leadership, tools, skills, knowledge and networks within the host country to empower marine science and support the blue economy and effective ocean management. In Seychelles, this has included Fellowships for 2 Seychellois scientists at Oxford University, 10 Seychellois scientists participating in field research and co-authored papers to meet national needs.

With two more expeditions to the Indian Ocean planned, Nekton will be gathering much more data before holding a State of the Indian Ocean Summit in 2022. The Summit will deliver scientific consensus on the state of the ocean and has the goal of creating an accurate and cost-effective marine spatial plan for the entire Indian Ocean region, including 30% protection.

Nekton is the zoological noun describing marine organisms that can swim and move independently of currents. With no government or major philanthropist backing our missions, we will keep swimming against the current to action change and conserve the world's oceans.

 **MORE INFORMATION**
www.nektonmission.org



TOWARDS A FAIRER FUTURE

PACIFIC YOUTH AND PARLIAMENTARIANS REGIONAL DIALOGUE

Across the small island nations of the Commonwealth Pacific, discriminatory laws left behind by the British Empire continue to blight the lives of women and girls and those of diverse sexual orientations and gender identities.



In October 2019, the Royal Commonwealth Society, as a member of the Equality & Justice Alliance, had the pleasure of facilitating a two-day convening in Samoa, which brought together parliamentarians and youth leaders from five Commonwealth Pacific countries to engage in dialogue on the need to reform such laws. This exciting event – a partnership with the Pacific Youth Council, the Samoa National Youth Council, and Parliamentarians for Global Action – marked important progress in formally involving young people in these critical discussions with their elected leaders. Seven parliamentarians and eleven youth champions and civil society leaders from Samoa, Tonga, Fiji, Kiribati and Tuvalu attended the event, affirming their commitment to promoting transformational change through addressing legislation that impedes the well-being of vulnerable groups in societies across the region.

In her keynote address, the Deputy Prime Minister of Samoa, the Hon. Fiame Naomi Mata’afa said: “in Samoa, we believe that all people should be equal, and that all people should be treated equally. We believe that no matter who we are we all deserve to be treated the same, whether it’s within our communities or through the law.”

At the dialogue, the Society was delighted to launch our new report, *A Fairer Future: Law reform and advocacy opportunities for women’s and PIDSOGIESC+ rights in the Commonwealth Pacific*. The PIDSOGIESC+ acronym, which stands for Pacific Islanders of Diverse Sexual Orientations, Gender Identities and Expressions, and Sex Characteristics, is the term that has been developed in the region to represent the diversity of those in the Pacific, including culturally-specific third gender communities such as Samoa’s fa’afafine and fafatama and Tonga’s leitis.

The report outlines key opportunities for government and civil society to work together to advance the reform of discriminatory laws in Commonwealth Pacific States, and also contains a review of the progress that has been made and

→ Youth delegates and parliamentarians discuss securing equality before the law for all in the Pacific

→→ Deputy Prime Minister of Samoa, Hon. Fiame Naomi Mata’afa, reads the Fairer Future report





ongoing gaps in legislation that continue to leave Pacific islanders vulnerable to discrimination and injustice.

Speaking at the launch, Tahere Siisiialafia, Chair of the Pacific Youth Council and a member of the Commonwealth Youth Gender and Equality Network (CYGEN), described the report as a “stepping stone of progress in bringing to the forefront the urgent need to vigilantly and diligently reform gender discriminatory laws embedded within justice systems”.

The dialogue represented a crucial opportunity for youth and parliamentarians to address discriminatory laws and work collaboratively towards an inclusive agenda. One of the main themes that emerged from the dialogue was the importance of establishing spaces where young people can engage with members of parliament, aiming to bridge the gap between governments and youth. It was highlighted during the discussions that in order to champion inclusion, the legislative process requires the participation of youth from the beginning.

Youth delegates also stressed the need to move beyond tokenistic inclusion. Many felt that when youth are included they are simply not listened to – but instead

just talked at. Bringing young people into the room was described by one youth delegate as a ‘box-checking exercise’.

Delegates also discussed the role of religion, which is one of the biggest challenges towards reforming discriminatory laws, particularly those that discriminate against sexual and gender minorities. Pacific countries are traditionally Christian in character, which has made this a taboo area of discussion. However, a positive and progressive stance was taken during discussions – with one parliamentarian noting that contrary to the perception of religion and culture being opposed to advancing inclusion, equality and justice are fundamental Pacific values.

To conclude the dialogue, participants developed an Action Plan – national commitments made by young people and parliamentarians to work together to advance equality and inclusion in their own countries. The Society is delighted to see such concrete actions being committed to by young people and leaders, and will be working to support the delivery of these critical plans moving forward.



MORE INFORMATION

Find out more about the Equality & Justice Alliance and to read the report, *A Fairer Future*: www.equalityjusticealliance.org

↑ **Parliamentarians and youth delegates of the Commonwealth Pacific gather for a group photo**

Photos: Macquarie Mailo



SINGAPORE'S BICENTENNIAL BACK TO THE FUTURE!

2019 marks 200 years since the founding of modern Singapore in 1819, a turning point in our history.



The Singapore Bicentennial commemoration was officially launched on 28 January 2019 by Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong. We have since seen hundreds of events and activities, organised by various community groups all across Singapore. These deepen and broaden our understanding of Singapore's history to chart a path forward for the future.

We have learnt much in the process.

Many did not know that Singapore's recorded history stretches back over 700 years, when we were first named "Singapura" – the Lion City – by a young prince Sang Nila Utama. He was from Palembang in modern-day Sumatra in Indonesia, and had arrived on our shores when he sought refuge after being caught in a storm.

Throughout those centuries, our fortunes ebbed and flowed with regional and global developments, swept up in the rise and fall of empires. We welcomed and absorbed layers of religious and cultural influences. We even disappeared into oblivion for stretches, particularly when major powers retreated from international trade – which explains why trade and globalisation are so intrinsic to Singapore's identity.

While Sir Stamford Raffles is largely credited for establishing modern Singapore as a free port and remains an icon in Singapore, we re-discovered many others who joined our journey at different times. These include two Scotsmen, William Farquhar and John Crawfurd, the first two Residents of Singapore. Many of our forefathers left their homeland to seek fortune in Singapore, but eventually laid roots and bequeathed us with our new and still evolving sense of national identity.

↑ **President Mdm Halimah Yacob (in teal) enjoys the Bicentennial Experience. Pictured is part of a cinematic, immersive showcase called Time Traveller**

Like most of our Commonwealth friends, we have inherited many aspects of the British legacy from its governance system and institutions, the use of the English language and common law. We also benefited from being part of the Commonwealth family, many of whom supported us after our unexpected independence.

Our Bicentennial commemoration has reflected elements that have contributed to our present-day achievements and identity – our multiculturalism, our openness, and deep sense for self-determination. The highlights of the year’s event ranged from the contemplative, such as the centrepiece Bicentennial Experience “From Singapore to Singaporean” which takes visitors back in time to witness key moments in Singapore’s transformation; to the delectable ‘Eat your History’ event, which recreated authentic recipes from a myriad of heritage dishes from Peranakan, Cantonese, Minangkabau and West Indian cultures. This reflects our perennial obsession with food and its resonance with our identity.

We have not kept the commemorations to Singapore alone, but also brought a fragment of our own history to London. Like many colonial officials, Raffles was learned and curious, and scrupulously collected Southeast Asian antiquities. We are honoured that the Asian Civilisations Museum in Singapore was able to collaborate with the British Museum on a two-part exhibition displaying his collection. The return exhibition in the British Museum, displaying a small part of our own exhibition for the first time, will run until 12 January 2020.

Both the UK and Singapore have also used the look-back into our history as a launchpad for the Singapore-United Kingdom Partnership for the Future (P4F). Building on our shared values and commitment to promote free trade, international law and multilateralism, the P4F involves the two governments, businesses, academia and our citizens, in a forward-leaning embrace of innovation and technology. We have turbo-charged new collaborative initiatives in areas ranging from digital economy; sustainable business and innovation; security and defence; to education, culture and youth.



This look-back on our history has helped us learn the lessons to stay the course to achieve an even brighter future. Our Commonwealth links will continue to be an important part of our past, present and future.

↑↑ Prime Minister Mr Lee Hsien Loong kicks off the bicentennial year in January 2019

↑ Chef Milind Sovani demonstrates how to create the Konkani Prawn Masala, which has Portuguese and Indian influences, at the ‘Eat Your History’ event

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Her Excellency Ms Foo Chi Hsia is Singapore’s High Commissioner to the United Kingdom, and Ambassador to Ireland and Iceland.

She was trained in law, is a career diplomat and has been conferred the Singapore Public Administration Medal, the Dame Commander of the Victorian Order and the Freedom of the City of London.

WATER SCARCITY: A GLOBAL CONCERN



Water scarcity already affects every continent. Water use has been growing globally at more than twice the rate of population increase in the last century, and an increasing number of regions are reaching the limit at which water services can be sustainably delivered. In 2018, Cape Town was just 90 days away from turning off the taps.

In 2018, Cape Town, narrowly avoided what officials termed 'Day Zero', the day when all major taps throughout the city would be turned off and residents would have to report to water points daily, to collect a maximum of 25 litres. A year on, the South African city's parched dams are now 80 per cent full.

Cape Town's difficulty however is just one example of an endemic problem,

which experts have long been warning about – water scarcity. Water scarcity can mean scarcity in availability due to physical shortage, or scarcity in access due to the failure of institutions to ensure a regular supply or due to lack of adequate infrastructure. Indeed despite covering 70 per cent of the Earth's surface, water, particularly drinking water, is not as plentiful as one might think. Only 3 per cent of all water is fresh.

“ We never know the worth of water 'til the well runs dry. ”

Thomas Fuller

Over one billion people lack access to water and another 2.7 billion find it scarce for at least one month of the year. A 2014 survey of the world's 500 largest cities estimates that one in four are in a situation of "water stress".

← A portion of Theewaterskloof dam, close to empty in 2018, showing tree stumps and sand usually submerged by the water of the dam

Photo:  Zaian
bit.ly/2QXlyOS

So why is the world facing a crisis of water scarcity and what is driving the increased demand for water?

The first reason for water scarcity is that the human population is constantly increasing whilst the water supply level remains the same. Given that there are almost one billion more inhabitations on Earth every 15-20 years, this has led to a progressive deficit in the global water supply. Indeed the use of water has grown at more than twice the rate of the human population over the last century in part due to industries such as agriculture, which accounts for 70 per cent of global freshwater use. For example, one cup of coffee takes 150 litres of water to produce whilst one piece of paper takes 100 litres of water.

“According to UN-endorsed projections, global demand for fresh water will exceed supply by 40 per cent in 2030, due to a combination of population growth, climate change and human action.”

Another cause is the uneven concentration of the global population – there is not a clear link between populated areas and the presence of water. Theoretically, there is enough renewable freshwater for everyone’s use, however, that does not take into consideration the geographical location of the water which has resulted in countries looking to non-renewable sources of water such as desalination plants which can cause damage to the environment and the city itself.

Further, a growing population and an uneven concentration of that population is compounded by climate change and large swings in weather such as drought, which has led to water scarcity crises in cities such as Cape Town and most recently Sydney. It is estimated that 700 million people worldwide could be displaced by intense water scarcity by 2030 (Global Water Institute, 2013).

Indeed, Cape Town is but the first example of a city that was unprepared for a longer than anticipated drought of three years. The traditionally wet winter, which many

were hoping for, never arrived. This left the city searching for new water to introduce into the system, by drilling into aquifers and building desalination plants. The only way the city eventually avoided disaster was to drastically cut the water consumption of residents and visitors to 87 litres per day.

Similarly, Sydney’s water storage levels have slumped from 96 per cent full in April 2017 to less than 46 per cent due to drought. With a hot and dry summer ahead, this level is expected to drop further. Real action is therefore needed by local and national governments to ensure that lessons are learned from the Cape Town crisis.

As the Commonwealth seeks to identify solutions to the water scarcity crisis, Singapore is an example of a country that has taken pro-active measures to educate its population about the importance of water conservation. As an island nation that has access to extremely limited natural resources of its own, Singapore has been importing most of its water from its neighbour Malaysia. Singapore has therefore looked to alternate sources of water, most notably NEWater. NEWater collects wastewater, and though a three-step process allows it be to be reused for consumption. In total, the country relies on four sources of water, with up to two-thirds of the country’s land surface used for water catchment. When its agreement with Malaysia expires in 2061, Singapore’s goal is to be entirely self-sufficient in its water supply.

At a recent meeting of Commonwealth parliamentarians in Uganda, Commonwealth member nations called on the Commonwealth to address the growing water scarcity crisis and drought in southern Africa. In November, South Africa’s Water and Sanitation Minister, Lindiwe Sisulu, announced that R900bn (£47 billion) is required to eradicate the water challenges faced by the country until 2030 and beyond.

The UN tells us that nearly two billion people live in countries experiencing high water stress. Water must be treated as a scarce resource, with a far stronger focus on managing demand. Southern Africa’s drought is expected to be a taste of the future so we need to learn quickly and adapt.

BARBADOS IN FOCUS

RCS Barbados Branch promotes the value and values of the Commonwealth through a series of educational projects.



Sports, Snacks, Smoothies – Healthy Fun is an educational project conceptualized, designed and executed by Dr Claire Durant for RCS Barbados to encourage healthy lifestyles in children and was sponsored by the New Zealand High Commission Fund. Interactive lectures specifically designed for teenagers on diet, nutrition and exercise were delivered by a distinguished panel. Students from five secondary schools (Alleyne, Coleridge and Parry, Combermere, Foundation and Ellerslie) participated and Chef Athlone McCollin (Executive Sous Chef, Hilton Barbados) conducted a cooking demonstration for students highlighting how healthy vegetarian, low cost snacks such as lentil puff-pies and sweet potato and pumpkin rostini can be easily and quickly made.



Christmas in the Square is a multi-faceted educational tool that can help students and youth embrace art and teach them that art is not only about the individual but also about the enjoyment that it brings to others. The concept allows the students and youth to create tree decorations, using as their themes, the unique images and emblems of the assigned countries. Their materials should be recycled, repurposed and natural materials. The project serves to increase the diffusion of knowledge about the Commonwealth and its member nations; to stimulate the creativity of students in the use and benefits of recycled material; to develop an awareness of Commonwealth values and to create an expression of community spirit and goodwill during the festive season. The project, which started in 2014, has been a tremendous success and has grown over the years from 19 trees in 2014 to an expected 170 trees in 2019.

Photos: Mr Maurice Giles, Barbados



Students who participated in 'Sports, Snacks, Smoothies – Healthy Fun' also had the opportunity to have a 'hands on' experience to learn where their food comes from by visiting **People, Environment, Growth Farm (PEG Farm), Easy Hall, St. Joseph**. PEG Farm demonstrates how agriculture can be conducted in balance with nature and in a sustainable fashion while producing healthy food. The educational tours of the medicinal herb gardens, vegetable gardens, chicken coops, pigsties, bee hiving areas, cow pastures and wild cliff areas were designed to grow awareness of the interdependence of humans with nature.

 **MORE INFORMATION**
www.thercs.org/international-network

ASSOCIATE FELLOW SPOTLIGHT

Nick de Bres is an RCS Associate Fellow and Queen's Young Leader Runner-up based in Sydney, Australia. He is a 21-year-old currently completing a double degree of a Bachelor of Arts and Bachelor of Laws under the Global Leadership Program at Macquarie University. Nick has a passion for youth mental health, disability care, anti-cyberbullying, and diplomacy.



I have always believed that if you see something worth doing, you should do it. As a person who has borne witness to the extreme effects of mental illness in both my family and friends, there was no question that I had to do something. Mental health is an issue that disproportionately affects young people. With 1.6 billion citizens in the Commonwealth under 30, we must take control and change the narrative. Our 'mental wealth' is our greatest asset.

Since 2015, I have organised 'Mental Wealth Forums' in schools which have engaged thousands of students who submit questions anonymously online without fear of judgement. These questions are answered by professional panellists ranging from psychiatrists, psychotherapists and counsellors to police officers and young people who have experienced mental illness first hand.

This work has led me to understand how – if unchecked – the increased prevalence of technology can detrimentally affect our mental health. In 2015, I began volunteering as an Executive Youth Council Member of the REELise Film Festival. This global annual event harnesses the power of technology to combat cyberbullying by enabling young people to gain hard skills to navigate negative cyberspace and use social media on their own terms.

An incredibly formative part of my life has been my time as a Volunteer and Disability Support Worker at the Holdsworth Community Centre. Over the past seven years – a third of my life – I have worked with children and adults living with physical and intellectual disabilities, as well as on seniors programs for those experiencing memory loss and dementia. This has shown me that, like the Commonwealth at large, a community is only strong when each one of its members are empowered to live to their full potential.

I was recently privileged to attend the High Commissioners Banquet at Guildhall at the invitation of the Royal Commonwealth Society, and courtesy of Macquarie University. The Banquet embodied the work of the Society – to connect people committed to improving the lives and prospects of Commonwealth citizens. It offered an opportunity to highlight my passions to change makers within the Commonwealth and beyond. The conversations were as informative as they were diverse, ranging from speaking about diplomacy with the acting High Commissioner for Sierra Leone, to talking with the CEO of the Commonwealth Games about addressing mental health in athletes.

“ I have always believed that if you see something worth doing, you should do it. As a person who has borne witness to the extreme effects of mental illness in both my family and friends, there was no question that I had to do something. ”

During this visit, I was also fortunate to sit down with H.E. The Hon George Brandis QC, High Commissioner for Australia in the United Kingdom at Australia House, and to attend the closing of The Queen's Young Leaders Programme with inspiring fellow awardees and former Prime Minister The Rt. Hon Sir John Major KG CH.

As an RCS Associate Fellow, the opportunities truly are boundless!

 **MORE INFORMATION**
http://bit.ly/Associate_Fellows

COMING UP IN THE COMMONWEALTH

25 NOVEMBER – 10 DECEMBER

16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence

19–22 JANUARY

The Education World Forum, London

20 JANUARY

UK-Africa Investment Summit, London



JANUARY

Commonwealth Youth Gender and Equality Network campaign launch

4 FEBRUARY

Tour of Australia House, London for Supporters of the Royal Commonwealth Society

21 FEBRUARY

Commonwealth Family Day, Westminster Abbey, London



8 MARCH

International Women's Day (United Nations)

9–12 MARCH

Commission on the Status of Women, United Nations, New York

9 MARCH

Commonwealth Day (worldwide) and the Commonwealth Service, Westminster Abbey, London

10 MARCH

RCS Commonwealth Banquet, Taj Hotel, London

21 MARCH

International Day of Forests (United Nations)

MAY

Commonwealth Health Ministers Meeting, Geneva

5 JUNE

World Environment Day (United Nations)

8 JUNE

World Oceans Day (United Nations)

21–25 JUNE

Youth, Women's, People's and Business Fora, Kigali, Rwanda



26–27 JUNE

Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting, Kigali, Rwanda



THE QUEEN'S COMMONWEALTH ESSAY COMPETITION

30 JUNE

Deadline for entries to The Queen's Commonwealth Essay Competition 2020

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of Commonwealth
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AWARDS CEREMONY

Buckingham Palace
Thursday, 31 October 2019

Highlights from this year's
celebration of creative writing and
young Commonwealth talent.



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