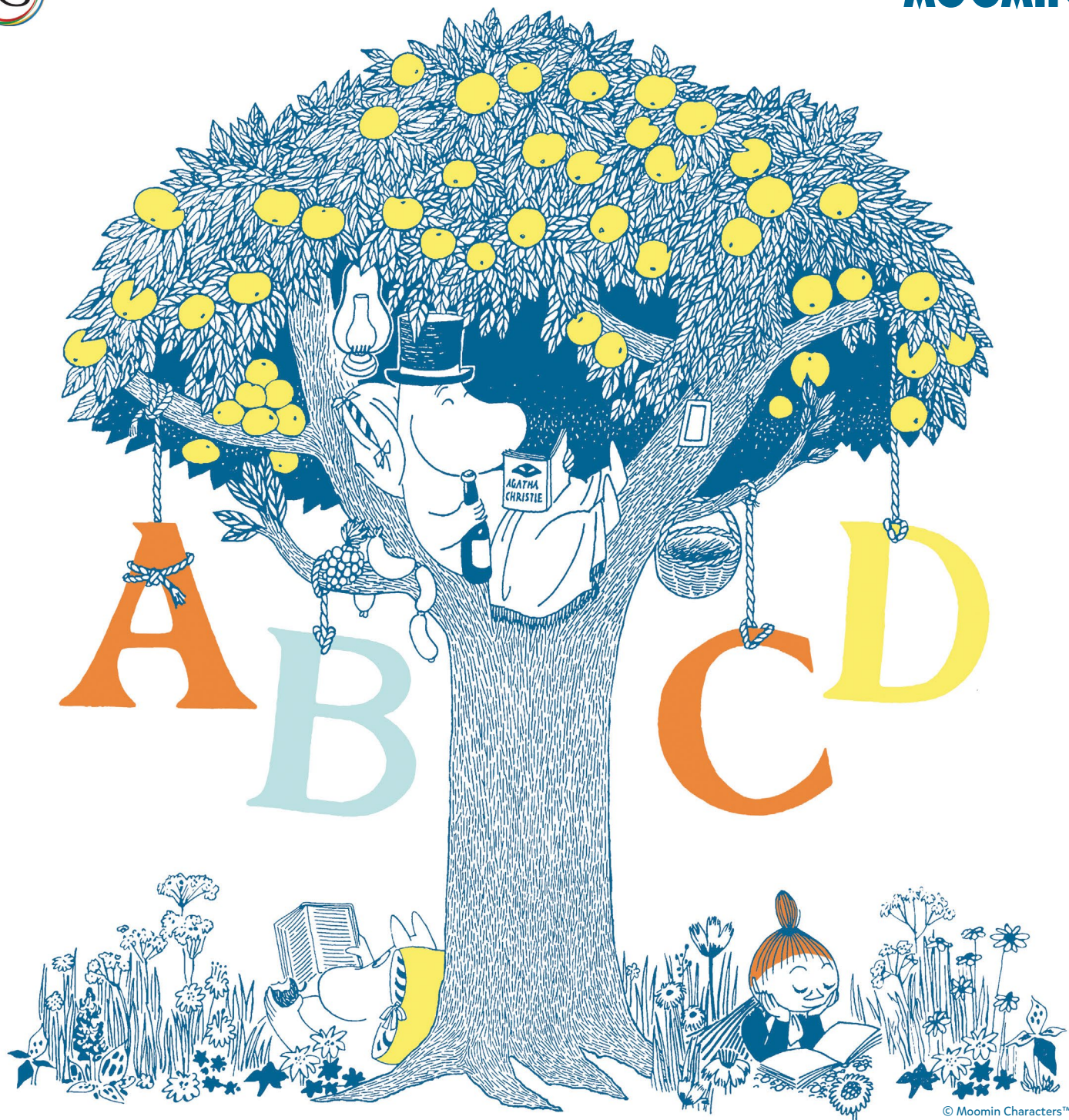


VOICES





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Moomin Characters Ltd proudly sponsors **The Queen's Commonwealth Essay Competition** because we believe that reading and writing can help us live better, happier, and more fulfilling lives.

For those yet to become acquainted with them, the Moomins are a family of white, roundish trolls that feature in a series of stories by the Finnish author and illustrator, **Tove Jansson**. Read around the world and beloved by children and adults alike, the Moomin books promote values

including friendship, tolerance, respect, love for nature, and a spirit of adventure.

When their creator Tove Jansson was a child, she read non-stop from an early age. In fact, she would often take a torch to bed with her so that she could keep reading into the night while the rest of the family slept. Books were always being exchanged and discussed both in her family home and within her circle of friends. It's little wonder that she became a storyteller!

So, we know first-hand how powerful words can be: they allow you to communicate your hopes and dreams, relate to

others, engage with the big issues of our times, and change the world. We encourage young people to enter next year's essay competition, and see where their words might take them!



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ROYAL COMMONWEALTH SOCIETY

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KEEP IN THE CONVERSATION

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↑ Lord Howell greets
HM The Queen at the
Commonwealth
Service

I have now reached the end of my two-term Presidency of the Royal Commonwealth Society and Chairmanship of the Council of Commonwealth Societies. But I have to say that it feels more like a beginning than an end.

This is because so many of the goals for which the Royal Commonwealth Society has striven through its work and advocacy, often in very adverse circumstances, are now beginning to look more in reach than for many years past.

Why do I see things this way? First and foremost because the times we now live in, the revolutionary technology and the spirit of the age are all uniquely favourable to organizations and entities with the characteristics and structure of the modern Commonwealth network.

More than almost any other major international body, the Commonwealth today is supported not just by the machinery of officialdom but by an enormous web spun from the grass roots, a people's Commonwealth in the most literal

sense. Thousands of linkages at every level, from the individual to the institutional and professional, from the most local to the national, have been invigorated by the connectivity revolution into close and continuous exchange between 54 nations on a scale never before envisaged or planned.

Of course, to a lesser degree these links have long been there, bound by use of a common language, the aspiration to common values and commitment to the rule of law, but the digital age has turbo-powered them. This is the Commonwealth family in action as never before, not without the problems of any family, far from uniform, far from agreeing about everything, but in unprecedented contact and exchange, thanks to everything from the internet and the Web

to Zoom-boostered convening power across the planet.

In this rapidly evolving scene, the Royal Commonwealth Society has been playing, and now finds itself increasingly playing, a central role. With its more than 60 branches across the Commonwealth and Associate Fellow network of over 1300 young leaders it is ideally positioned to do so.

Through such a Commonwealth-wide network, the Society has flown the flag for the importance of this voluntary network of nations, peoples and communities. As ever, the Commonwealth embraces two interwoven stories – the future it offers to an enormous global network of peoples, (possibly the world's biggest), on the one hand, and its special importance for the UK on the other.

For the RCS the international story is now increasingly one of soft power, of learning, teaching, sharing, connecting, counselling, campaigning and laying the essential groundwork for business and enterprise in more parts of the world, many of them significantly disadvantaged, than any other comparable network.

For instance, during the current pandemic, in which the whole Commonwealth has proved to be a model of cooperation, it is more important than ever to focus on literacy, one of the Society's four key areas in its new Strategic Plan. Children's education has been disrupted and the Society wants to help. The Society is launching a literacy programme that will be delivered online and linked to the RCS flagship - The Queen's Commonwealth Essay Competition.

There will be more global crises to come. Dealing with climate turmoil is one, but there will be others. As nation learns to speak to nation in the language of soft power and influence rather than by demand and coercion, the Commonwealth will prove more and more to be the obvious model and the ideal vehicle for mutual transmission, cooperation and dialogue.

As the colossal advantages of Commonwealth membership in new world



conditions sink in at the highest policy-making levels, not just in London but in numerous capitals across the continents, expect to hear much more on this theme which is becoming so central to global progress.

In the meantime, while I say farewell as President, I intend to stay close – because I wish to be as much in support as I can be of this emerging world pattern and of the vital contribution which the RCS, at the heart of the Commonwealth family, will be making to the very different world order ahead.

**The Right Honourable the Lord Howell
of Guildford PC**

↑↑ Lord Howell
with winners of
The Queen's
Commonwealth Essay
Competition 2016

↑ Lord Howell
welcomes HRH The
Duchess of Cornwall
as inaugural Vice-
Patron of the RCS on
the occasion of its
150th anniversary

INAUGURAL GROUP OF AMBASSADORS APPOINTED

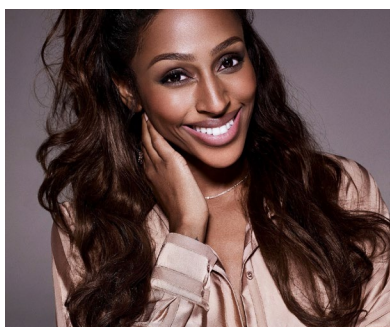
In June 2020, to mark the Society's 152nd anniversary, we were delighted to announce the appointment of Geri Horner, David Walliams, Alexandra Burke and Gyles Brandreth as inaugural Ambassadors. They were soon joined by world heavyweight boxing champion Anthony Joshua and UN Patron of Oceans Lewis Pugh.

Together the Society's six Ambassadors bring a wealth of experience and knowledge across all four of the Society's key areas of work: connected communities, literacy, equality and the environment.



Gyles Brandreth

Before joining the RCS as an Ambassador, Gyles Brandreth, writer and actor, served as a master of ceremonies at the annual Awards Ceremony for The Queen's Commonwealth Essay Competition at Buckingham Palace with HRH The Duchess of Cornwall. Through Gyles' extensive travels he has visited Commonwealth countries in four regions and is very keen to encourage engagement and opinions on issues such as current affairs and climate change amongst young people. Gyles said: "I look forward to continuing to support the Society's impressive work championing literacy and creativity among children across the Commonwealth."



Alexandra Burke

Singer Alexandra Burke, who gave a stunning performance at the 2020 Commonwealth Service at Westminster Abbey organised by the Royal Commonwealth Society, is also an Ambassador of the Notting Hill Carnival and The Prince's Trust. Alexandra is keen to work with young people to promote the need for equal and inclusive communities in today's society. She said of the Society's work: "So many values are close to my own heart, especially better connected and inclusive communities and providing meaningful and impactful education opportunities for young people".



Geri Horner

Geri Horner (née Halliwell), award-winning singer-songwriter and author, is a strong believer in the importance of bringing communities together to create a brighter future. Indeed Geri has previously held other charitable roles having served as a UN Goodwill Ambassador and as an Ambassador of The Prince's Trust. Geri comments: "In such uncertain times, it is more important than ever that we, as a global community, continue to listen and learn from each other and stay united on our shared values as we take positive steps in climate action, and achieving racial and gender equality."



Anthony Joshua

Anthony Joshua, OBE, world heavyweight boxing champion, who delivered an empowering speech at the Commonwealth Service last year, is looking forward to working with the rich cultural heritage of the Commonwealth's 1.4 billion young people. Anthony said: "In these uncertain times, it is easy to let difference divide us, but difference is a beautiful thing that should be celebrated and cherished, not despised."



Lewis Pugh

UN Patron of Oceans, Lewis Pugh, OIG, brings an extensive knowledge of climate change and our ecosystems. This knowledge and experience will be invaluable towards helping the Society achieve our aims over the next five years. When speaking about this subject Lewis' remarks: "The climate crisis is seriously impacting the lives of citizens around the Commonwealth. I look forward to working with the Society to help build a better future for all of us."



David Walliams

Best-selling children's author and comedian David Walliams, who has been an active supporter of The Queen's Commonwealth Essay Competition for many years, brings with him a wealth of experience of working with young people. He is excited about working with the Society to champion literacy in the Commonwealth and learn what issues are important to young Commonwealth citizens through their writing. David said: "I look forward to hearing what young people have to say about climate action, and encouraging the creative spirits of young people across the Commonwealth as they reflect on our common values and challenges."

Since their appointment, each of our Ambassadors has been actively involved in promoting the values and aims of the Commonwealth and are making a real difference to our work.

During the 2020 virtual Awards Ceremony for The Queen's Commonwealth Essay Competition, David Walliams and Alexandra Burke took part in reading extracts from the winning pieces. The Ceremony also featured highlights from workshops that the Winners and Runners-up experienced with Geri Horner and Lewis Pugh. The involvement of our Ambassadors was an integral part in making the Ceremony and the Competition the success it was. (Read more on pp. 6-8).

Dr Linda Yueh, comments:

“Today, through youth empowerment, education and high-level advocacy, the Society champions the importance of connected communities, literacy, equality, and the environment. We look forward to working with Geri, David, Alexandra, Gyles, Lewis and Anthony to help us engage with a broader audience of individuals and organisations that share our vision of a better world.”



MORE INFORMATION

Find out more about how each of our Ambassadors plans to help us achieve our mission by watching their introductory videos on our YouTube channel: www.youtube.com/c/RoyalCommonwealthSociety

THE QUEEN'S COMMONWEALTH ESSAY COMPETITION 2020 AWARDS CEREMONY



↑ The Duchess of Cornwall with the Winners and Runners-up of the 2020 Competition

In November 2020 we were delighted to host the first ever virtual Awards Ceremony for the Winners and Runners-up of The Queen's Commonwealth Essay Competition (QCEC) 2020, the world's oldest international school writing competition.

Attracting nearly 13,000 entries, the theme of the 2020 Competition was 'Climate Action and the Commonwealth'. 130 volunteer judges, drawn from 40 different countries across the Commonwealth, assessed the entries with the final judging decision taken by an expert panel of authors, journalists and poets, which included the writer Anthony Horowitz; written word poet Suli Breaks; journalist Matthew Parris; novelist Wendy Holden; award-winning young adult author Zalika Reid-Benta; and the Commonwealth Writer's Prize winner and poet, Sia Figiel.

Reflecting on the pieces, Anthony Horowitz, author of *Alex Rider*, said:

"There was a sense that these young writers, inspired by Greta Thunberg, are not only aware of the global challenges that they face but are more prepared to tackle them than my own generation. With everything that 2020 has thrown at us, it's hard to be forward-looking and positive. The joy of these essays was that so many of them were."

The 2020 Winners and Runners-up were from across the Commonwealth (Singapore,

India, Canada and Ghana) and wrote inspiring poems, essays and narratives on the topic 'Climate Action and the Commonwealth'.

Unfortunately, due to the ongoing coronavirus pandemic the young winners were unable to travel to London for Winners' Week and its usual activities; however, we look forward to welcoming them to London when it is safe to do so.

Instead, like much of the world, the Awards Ceremony turned virtual. Hosted by Ambassador of the Royal Commonwealth Society, Gyles Brandreth, the virtual ceremony presented a unique opportunity to celebrate the winners' successes, emphasise the importance of creative writing and provide a platform to share the impact the Competition has had over the years with a global audience.

For more than a century, this competition has positively affected so many across the Commonwealth. Amongst those who won the Competition is Pulitzer Prize winning journalist Mei Fong who contributed a video message to the ceremony. She reflected on how winning the competition changed her life and allowed her to pursue a career in writing. To this year's winners she said:

“I want to congratulate you and I want to tell you to keep on writing because it really will change your life and you can change the world.”

Chair of the Royal Commonwealth Society, Dr Linda Yueh had the pleasure of contacting the winners, runners-up and their families to give them the good news. During the ceremony the much awaited announcements were made revealing the 2020 winners:

- Senior Winner, Aditya Choudhury, Singapore: 'Voices from the Blue World'.
- Senior Runner-up: Ananya Mukerji, India, 'The Waters Rise'.
- Junior Winner: Cassandra Nguyen, Canada, 'Actions Speak Louder'.
- Junior Runner-up: Eleni Bazikamwe, Ghana, 'The Little Prince comes back to Earth'.



↑ Stephen Fry reads an extract from 'Voices from the Blue World', a piece by Aditya Choudhury, Senior Winner



← Kareena Kapoor reads an extract from 'The Waters Rise', a piece by Ananya Mukerji, Senior Runner-up

The ceremony also featured notable literary figures, actors, and humanitarians from across the Commonwealth and included highlights of workshops that the Winners and Runners-up had with the Society's Ambassadors, Geri Horner (née Halliwell) and Lewis Pugh, to discuss their pieces, creative writing and the theme of 'Climate Action the Commonwealth'.

We were also privileged to be joined by our Vice-Patron, Her Royal Highness The Duchess of Cornwall who spoke with each of the winners, congratulated them and presented them with their award.

Ambassadors of the Royal Commonwealth Society, David Walliams and Alexandra Burke, were joined by British actor and writer, Stephen Fry, and Bollywood actress, Kareena Kapoor, to read extracts from the winning pieces during the ceremony.



MORE INFORMATION

Watch the Awards Ceremony:

www.royalcommonwealthsociety.org/the-qcec

MEET THE WINNERS

Senior Winner



Aditya Choudhury
Singapore, 'Voices from the Blue World'

Aditya Choudhury is a 14-year-old from Singapore. He is a ninth-grade student of GHS, Singapore. Titled 'Voices from the Blue World', his winning piece imagined an underwater Commonwealth Conference of sea creatures in which the keynote speaker, a grouper, which is a native fish of Singapore, assures all the marine creatures of the Blue World that they have a bright future of coexistence with the human world – the Green World. The Queen's Commonwealth Essay Competition on 'Climate Action' has made him value the power of words to unleash change and shape our future!

Junior Winner



Cassandra Nguyen
Canada, 'Actions Speak Louder'

Cassandra is Nguyen is 13 years old and lives in Ontario, Canada. She is in Grade 8 and currently attends Ashton Meadows Public School in Ontario, Canada.

She has enjoyed both reading and writing stories since she was very young and literature has always been important to her because when she reads a poem or a book, it almost feels like you are being taken to the world that the author created.

Senior Runner-up



Ananya Mukerji
India, 'The Waters Rise'

Ananya is a student in Grade 11 undertaking the International Baccalaureate Diploma Program (IBDP) at Dhirubhai Ambani International School. She has been writing creatively since she was 9 years old. Besides being passionate about writing, particularly poetry, she expresses herself through art and theatre. She lives in Mumbai with her parents and her two year-old cocker spaniel, Tessa.

Junior Runner-up




Eleni Bazikamwe
Ghana, 'The Little Prince comes back to Earth'

Eleni was born in Nairobi, Kenya, and is the daughter of a Belgian mother and a Greek-Burundese father. She has spent the first years of her childhood in Kenya and moved to Accra at the age of 5 where her father is currently working for the EU Delegation to Ghana. Throughout her travels across the Kenyan savannahs and the beautiful Ghanaian coast, Eleni has had the opportunity to see how wonderful the environment is, but also how vulnerable it is, which is why she was so happy to participate in The Queen's Commonwealth Essay Competition.

MORE INFORMATION

Read the winning pieces and learn more about the 2020 Winners:

 www.royalcwsociety.org/winning-pieces

THE DUCHESS OF CORNWALL'S READING ROOM

During the 2020 lockdown, HRH The Duchess of Cornwall, Vice-Patron of the Royal Commonwealth Society, prepared two lists of her favourite books. The lists were published by the Press & Journal, Scotland's oldest daily newspaper and Her Royal Highness's local paper when she is at home north of the border. Many publications across the Commonwealth subsequently featured the "recommended reads", and The Duchess received a huge number of letters from bookworms all over the world, some agreeing, some disagreeing with her choices. But the correspondents were unanimous on one point: books had been, and continued to be, a vital lifeline in lockdown. Through reading, people knew that, although lonely, they were not alone.



Books also allowed our imaginations to travel overseas, even if we could not do so in the flesh. It was, unfortunately, not possible for Their Royal Highnesses to undertake their planned Spring and Autumn tours last year, to which they had been looking forward. Since her marriage to HRH The Prince of Wales, Her Royal

Highness has greatly enjoyed the opportunities she has had to spend time in many Commonwealth countries. On each tour, she always tries to include at least one literacy-themed engagement, to enable her to learn more about her hosts' literary heritage and future. The Duchess very much believes that one of the best ways to get to know a new country is by reading its literature.

Her passion for Commonwealth literature, combined with the generous interest people took in her book lists, planted a seed. This month, that seed has borne fruit in the form of "The Duchess of Cornwall's Reading Room" (@duchessofcornwallsreadingroom), an online platform on which Her Royal Highness will regularly post information about books she has loved; books she is reading; authors she admires; and the enormous social, emotional and educational benefits of reading. The Reading Room is to be a community space that will encourage all ages and all levels of reader, anywhere in the world, to discover a place where books and words belong to them. In The Duchess's words, it is to be a "resource, a reassurance and a refuge for all book lovers, on a digital desert island of our own".


To mark the launch of The Duchess of Cornwall's Reading Room, Her Royal Highness has sent this message to the readers of "Commonwealth Voices":

I would be delighted if you would join me in my Reading Room to explore the magical world of books and the extraordinary people who write them.

↑ The Duchess of Cornwall's Reading Room

©Hugo Burnand

MORE INFORMATION

 Available on Instagram

 @duchessofcornwallsreadingroom



BUILDING BACK BETTER

As the world seeks to understand the long-term effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, there is a new focus across many Commonwealth countries on a speedy recovery. This is a focus which the City of London shares.

As the world's leading financial centre, I am proud that London is well placed to lead industry in speeding up that recovery worldwide, thanks to its depth of expertise and global reach.

However, while we must be speedy in our recovery, we must not rush to go back to normal. This is not just a case of asking ourselves "how do we build back?" but "how do we build back better?".

That question has dominated my discussions over recent months, across all industries and markets. I have witnessed an

unprecedented renewed focus on Environmental, Social and Corporate Governance goals (or ESG) and we have really seen, during the COVID-19 pandemic, the resilience of sustainable investment. We have seen the core thesis of ESG – managing risk – validated, as these strategies outperform in global economic downturn.

In particular, the City is keen to ensure any recovery is a green one. Which is why in November we hosted the Green Horizons Summit, to better understand how we can mobilise finance to aid the greening of the economy. The event was a huge success,

Photo:
©Clive.Totman



← Lord Mayor with Mark Carney, UN Special Envoy for Climate and Finance, Sir David Attenborough, and Alok Sharma, President of COP26

with over 90 countries represented and 300,000 people watching the speeches and presentations online. This was all in preparation for COP26 which will now be held in Glasgow in 2021.

Already, the UK government has been working closely with fellow Commonwealth countries to make for a greener future. Last year, the UK government launched the Sustainable Infrastructure Fund at the African Investment Summit. This is a fantastic opportunity for commercial investors in a range of Commonwealth markets to partner with government to boost sustainable infrastructure. And in the City, we have commissioned an external analysis on blended finance and the important role this will play in creating a carbon-free economy.

The unique position of the City of London means we can stimulate interest in financial offerings dedicated to funding sustainable products. For example, we are working closely with the Impact Investing Institute in pursuit of mobilising private capital at scale into impact focussed investment. Our Green Finance Institute is the leading think-tank in the green economy – both of which demonstrate that London is a centre of excellence for sustainable finance.

I think this is an exciting time for the UK and its fellow Commonwealth countries. We

look forward to supporting the CHOGM Business Forum due to take place in Rwanda this June. I hope – subject to Public Health Restrictions – we can once again host the High Commissioners' Banquet at the Guildhall in September of this year where we can strengthen our relationships to secure new opportunities for business collaboration and innovation.

London is both a global City and a centre of gravity within the Commonwealth. Our bonds of friendship are strengthened through trade, investment and innovation. I am confident that these deep links with our friends across the Commonwealth will put us all in a good position to come back from the pandemic with a renewed sense of purpose and focus allowing us all to build back better.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Alderman William Russell took office as the 692nd Lord Mayor of the City of London in November 2019. In September 2020 William was elected to serve a further year in office, to provide continuity of civic governance during the Coronavirus emergency.

His mayoral theme for his time in office is "Global UK – The New Future", supporting businesses through the COVID-19 crisis, speeding the recovery and seizing the opportunities of the new future.

THE ROAD TO COP26



In 2020, the world grappled with the devastating impact of COVID-19 and that challenge continues. But the pandemic has not stopped the climate crisis: our world is getting hotter and climate damage is increasing. We know this will only worsen without greater action and that the poorest will be amongst the most vulnerable to the impacts of climate change.

On 12 December 2020, the world came together at the Climate Ambition Summit, hosted by the UK, UN and France alongside our partners Italy and Chile, to mark the fifth anniversary of the landmark Paris Agreement. Ambitious plans were proposed, including 45 Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs), 24 net-zero commitments, and 20 adaptation and resilience plans, covering over 71 countries. Furthermore, the transition to a zero-carbon economy is accelerating! In early 2021, we will see countries representing about 65% of global CO₂ emissions and 70% of the world's economy committed to reaching carbon neutrality. Commonwealth states were at the forefront of this advance: with ambitious NDCs from countries like Jamaica and Kenya, coal phase-outs announced by Pakistan, and India committing to 450GW of solar by 2030.

In other words, the Paris Agreement – the compass of international climate action – is beginning to work, further boosted by the new US administration re-joining this landmark international deal.

My travels as Minister for Commonwealth have made clear to me that this unique family of 54 nations will have an important opportunity to advance this climate action in June, when Rwanda will host the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) in Kigali. As the UK passes the Commonwealth Chair-in-Office baton to Rwanda, we will continue to champion the role of the Commonwealth, its member states, networks and 2.4 billion citizens as a diverse, powerful and global force for good.



Ahead of COP26 in Glasgow, CHOGM will also help us focus on four key ways to build back better and greener. We must support vulnerable communities around the world adapt and build resilience to climate shocks, which is vital in progressing the Sustainable Development Goals. We need to increase mitigation efforts to put us on track to 1.5 degrees, on a course to net zero that is fair for all. We need to work with the private sector to unleash the power of capital markets and get sustainable finance flowing to support these efforts. We also need to bring people together to share ideas and collaborate on practical action around adaptation and resilience, clean energy, clean transport, finance and nature-based solutions. This will deepen the international collaboration needed to tackle this crisis.

As COP26 President, the UK will lead by example. We are committing to reducing emissions by the fastest rate of any major economy; doubling International Climate Finance (ICF) to £11.6 billion over the next five years; and ending direct support for the fossil fuel energy sector overseas.

Success at COP26 will depend on ALL of us. This global challenge requires global solutions and the Commonwealth has an important part to play. We have a collective responsibility to build on the ambition and growing success of the Paris Agreement with lasting and impactful climate decisions. Together we can – and will – deliver for our planet and for our future generations. I look forward to seeing you in Glasgow!

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Lord Ahmad is the Minister for South Asia and the Commonwealth at the Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO). He was first appointed as the Prime Minister's Special Representative on Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict and as Minister of State for the Commonwealth and the United Nations on 13 June 2017.

Outside of politics, Lord Ahmad had a 20 year career in the City working in banking and finance, including at the NatWest Group where he was a senior manager in corporate banking and financial markets. He was later Vice-President and Marketing Director of Alliance Bernstein and his last role before joining the government was as Strategy and Marketing Director at Sucden Financial.

LOOKING FORWARD AS A NETWORK

Following the appointment of new Executive Committee Members in June 2020, the Commonwealth Youth Gender and Equality Network (CYGEN) now comprises 190 members representing 36 Commonwealth countries.

Community Conversations

Despite the limitations on physical gathering, CYGEN's Youth Transitions in Education, Employment, and Entrepreneurship (Youth Transitions) Working Group has successfully launched Community Conversations - a virtual platform committed to exploring the nuances of issues such as youth un(der)-employment and the sexual and reproductive health rights of girls and young people that have emerged due to the COVID-19 pandemic. At the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association's first-ever virtual Commonwealth Youth Parliament, a representative from CYGEN spoke to the delegates about the social impacts of the pandemic on employment opportunities for women, young people, minority ethnic communities, and LGBT+ people.

On the next page, Taofeekat Adigun speaks about her experiences at the Commonwealth Youth Parliament and the importance of addressing youth employment.

#Reform53

Building on the launch of the powerful #Reform53 campaign, CYGEN's Sexual and Reproductive Health Rights working group hosted a virtual event encouraging young people to do the #Reform53 'equality palm' and film their calls to leaders across the Commonwealth to reform discriminatory laws. This follows Tanya Lallmon's work as a



CYGEN member and #Reform53 Campaign Lead hosting panel discussions centered around the key issues of the campaign.

Looking Forward

There is still much to look forward to in the work CYGEN continues to undertake: further Community Conversations, capacity-building schemes for members, a toolkit on involving women and youth in political leadership and governance, and collaborations with various partners and stakeholders advocating for gender equality and LGBT+ rights. With the Commission on the Status of Women and the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting both on the horizon, CYGEN is excited to look ahead and is determined to be bold and creative in being a key voice calling for equality across the Commonwealth. In the coming months – whatever they may hold – CYGEN looks forward to taking the next steps in strengthening our mandate, our members, our work and our goals.



MORE INFORMATION

Find out more about CYGEN:

www.royalcwsociety.org/pages/category/cygen

THE IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON YOUTH EMPLOYMENT



Taofeekat Adigun, member of the Commonwealth Youth Gender and Equality Network (CYGEN) and the founder of Student Network, shares her experience of representing CYGEN at the Commonwealth Youth Parliament.

At the first-ever virtual Commonwealth Youth Parliament, I had the pleasure of representing CYGEN as an expert witness, and joining fellow young people from across the Commonwealth in addressing COVID-19 and its devastating impacts on the world of work for youth. It was a highly interactive session with delegates, discussing issues such as the extent of the inequalities of minority groups, experiences of social inequities post-pandemic, and the utility of mitigating COVID-19 funds for youth, which helped in scrutinizing and putting forward a social bill.

The pandemic has shown us just how fragile and globalised our economies and societies are. Given the economic impact of COVID-19, young people have been some of the worst affected by the global upturn in unemployment rates with lay-offs, redundancy, and upsurge in temporary and part-time jobs. The continued instability of the pandemic deepens the reluctance of employers to return to full-time employment models leaving many with precarious earnings. With COVID-19 impediments on workforce, the future of work has come earlier than expected. Many jobs are becoming obsolete, while the new jobs springing up reflect the increasingly urgent need for rapid technological and digital upskilling among young people. Young people need to focus on their employability status by upgrading and upskilling with relevant skills/training needed in their various career paths.

CYGEN has always been on the forefront of advocacy for youth transition and decent employment in the Commonwealth space. For the Community Conversations series



Photo: ©Commonwealth Parliamentary Association

organized by the Youth Transitions Working Group, the first episode centered on 'Re-creating and Re-imagining Employment during COVID-19' with Nithya Srinivasan, policy/research analyst consultant at the World Bank, Nonjabulo Gumede, Founder of Travel for Change Adventures, and Kristofferson Nunes, Founder and CEO of UCA Caribbean, offering insights from a range of perspectives. **You can watch the full episode on the CYGEN Facebook Page.**

Both as part of the Youth Transitions Working Group and through my own work supporting youth in upskilling, it has been exciting to consider how youth continue to be resilient and are utilising innovation, idea-sharing, and collaborative spaces to not only prepare for the future of works but to adapt to the possibilities of life in a post-pandemic era.

As the **Secretary-General of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association Stephen Twigg** said: "Young people's voices must be heard, particularly during challenging periods such as a global pandemic". From CYGEN bringing a youth-driven perspective in tackling unemployment to the opportunity that the Commonwealth Youth Parliament offers young people eager to think about the emerging and critical realities that the current situation has exacerbated and produced, it is apparent that young people need to be at the forefront to provide the imagination and innovation required to forge through the post-pandemic era.

WHAT TO EXPECT AT CHOGM 2021?

A Rwandan proverb says: “Two people working together are better than eight fighting against each other”. As a landlocked country, we know that regional and international cooperation is an imperative to thrive and succeed. Even more so, since COVID-19 has highlighted that in an interconnected and interdependent world, countries share a common destiny.

The accelerated international response to the current public health emergency is an illustration that when we combine our efforts, we have the capacity to prepare for future threats but also, to act on pre-existing ones. In that context, the Commonwealth, which has been leader on environment and climate change that continue to affect communities around the globe, could also play a key role in ensuring equitable access to and distribution of fairly priced COVID-19 vaccines.

The 26th Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) scheduled to take place in June 2021, in Rwanda, under the theme “Delivering a common future: connecting, innovating, transforming”, will be an opportunity for Commonwealth Leaders to reflect on new forms of global governance while also raising ambitions on key decisions taken during CHOGM 2018. It will also be the occasion to build unified positions ahead of key upcoming events, including the 26th UN Climate Change Conference of the Parties (COP26) scheduled for early November 2021, in Glasgow, UK.

It is indeed time to put our words into action, by making our governance models more inclusive; by making our health systems more resilient; by ensuring our economies and trade attain sustainable growth; by strengthening our social protection systems; by taking bold action on climate and by unlocking the advantages of technology for development.

We must adapt our national, regional and international systems to respond to both current and pressing challenges and as our talented and innovative young people will inherit this world, we shall do it with them, rather than for them.

Let us build on CHOGM’s momentum, to strengthen existing strategic partnerships and alliance as well as build new ones towards achieving the UN Sustainable Development Goals, as well as other major international commitments designed to preserve global common goods.

As we look ahead with optimism that the global health situation will improve over the next few months, Rwanda, as the youngest member of the Commonwealth family of Nations, is looking forward to welcoming all of you in your extended home.

Our national COVID-19 response has been focused on multi-sectoral collaboration and built upon regional and international responses. As we continue to strengthen our capabilities, be reassured that we will host you in a safe environment, in respect of all World Health Organization recommendations.

Murakaza neza mu Rwanda! (Welcome to Rwanda!)

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Vincent Biruta:

currently Rwanda’s Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, Dr. Biruta has previously been

in charge of key cabinet portfolios including Environment; Natural Resources; Education; Public Works, Transport & Communication; and Health. He also served as President of the Senate and President of the National Transitional Assembly.

COMMONWEALTH UNITED BY MUSIC



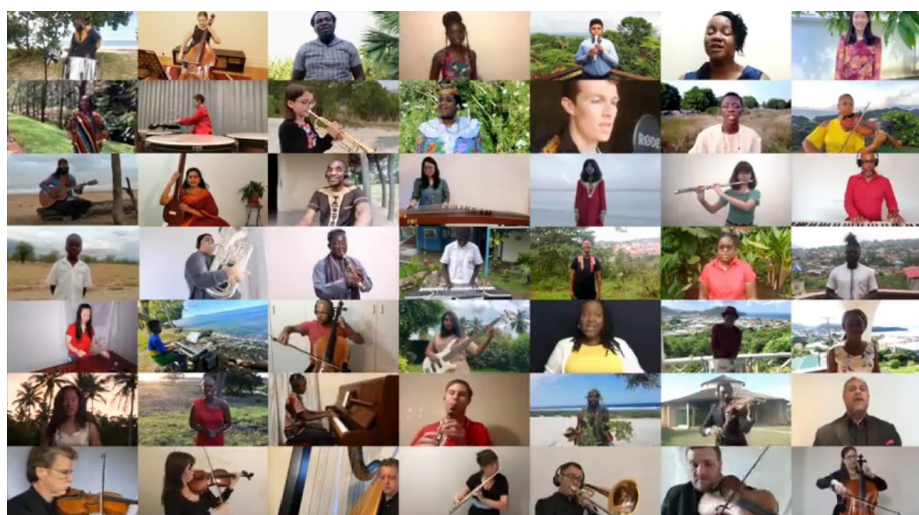
The United Commonwealth COVID-19 Music Project is a never-before-attempted musical feat to combine the voices of musicians from the Commonwealth member countries in one powerful virtual performance.

In partnership with the Commonwealth Secretariat, The Dionysus Ensemble invited applications from right across the Commonwealth and one musician from each country was selected to represent their nation in this demonstration of the power of music to lift spirits, improve mental health and encourage international camaraderie, as countries face up to the challenges of the pandemic.

Each of the selected musicians filmed a 30 second interview (all to be found on The Dionysus Ensemble YouTube channel) to introduce themselves and their country and to show how the pandemic has affected people from all over the Commonwealth.

The Dionysus Ensemble recorded this **track** which all of the musicians representing Commonwealth countries then joined to create the project finale.

Commonwealth Secretary-General Patricia Scotland described this never-before attempted musical feat as an “uplifting and a powerful testament to the Commonwealth’s resilience”. The Secretary-General also emphasised the importance of considering the arts in COVID-19 recovery strategies saying: “It is not just about employment prospects and developing human capital, it is also about mental health and other health benefits. Research suggests that involvement in art or music not only raises morale, promotes a sense of community and improves personal resilience but also has a measurable impact on stress levels and benefits the immune system.”



“I am sincerely very grateful for your work which will help so many people in my country to feel good too, including me” Belingo – pianist, Mauritius

↑ Dionysus & Commonwealth Musicians

“I felt incredibly happy and lucky. It was like a dream becoming real (to be chosen to represent Cameroon) I learnt that one should always try and never underestimate himself/herself. More importantly, I learnt that team work is always wonderful. I will use this to impact my environment and encourage the younger generation, especially women, to believe and work for their dreams.” Nakita – singer, Cameroon

The Dionysus team in the UK said the project was a wonderful opportunity to connect with people from all walks of life all over the world putting this together. It’s been an incredible chance to create the most extraordinary network across the Commonwealth in a year when musicians’ livelihoods everywhere have been hard hit, and to share some joy. Please do enjoy the **video**.

ABOUT THE DIONYSUS ENSEMBLE

Founded in 2003 by Artistic Director **Léonie Adams**, The Dionysus Ensemble has a strong belief in the power of music to change lives and effect change. The Dionysus team are professional musicians working at the highest level within the UK, including performing at the Proms, recording at Abbey Road Studios & touring with artists such as Shirley Bassey & Jason Donovan and orchestras such as the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra and the London Symphony Orchestra. They are Ensemble in Residence for the Commonwealth Resounds.

www.thedionysusensemble.com

UK-CYPRUS YOUTH EXCHANGE LAUNCHED

In December 2020, the Society was delighted to partner with Clarion Futures, the charitable foundation of Clarion Housing Group, and The #iwill Fund to launch an exciting youth exchange programme, focused on delivering social action and fostering connections between young people in the United Kingdom (UK) and Cyprus.



ROYAL COMMONWEALTH SOCIETY



CLARION
FUTURES

Proudly supporting
youth social action



Department for
Digital, Culture
Media & Sport



In the wake of COVID-19, community cohesion and social action seems more important than ever, as young people from across the world play an increasingly important role in tackling the challenges our global society faces.

The main aim of this youth exchange programme is to promote positive values, share learning on the global issue of COVID-19 on young people, and lead on social action projects that will change the world.

Over the next few months young people from communities in the UK and Cyprus will come together with a common purpose: building and maintaining connected communities during and post the COVID-19 crisis.

Working with Clarion Futures and Associate Fellows of the Royal Commonwealth Society we will be equipping young people with the skills, knowledge and expertise needed to become agents of change and empower them to advocate on and address social issues within their own communities and across the Commonwealth and the UK.

In December 2020, the Society and Clarion Futures delivered the first virtual residential for exchange participants. Max Louth, who took part in the training and Model

Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) describes the experience:



I was so excited when I saw the opportunity to join the Commonwealth Youth Exchange Programme. Someone once told me to say yes to every opportunity that is thrown at you, so I put in my application and got stuck in!

The youth exchange programme is all about developing a social action project that can be run not only on a national scale, but on an international scale too. The programme is made up from ten participants based in the UK and ten based in Cyprus. It is being run by the Royal Commonwealth Society and Clarion Futures.

At the end of 2020 I sent off my social action project proposals. I have decided to focus on two different areas, these are Food Poverty and Climate Change. These are two issues that I feel strongly about. The planning of my projects are still very new and developing but I cannot wait to start working on them more. I will be working with different organisations across the country and I am really looking forward to growing my connections and working with new people to tackle these challenges.



So far we have been having Zoom meetings (which I think we all cannot wait to say goodbye to) but they have been really useful. We have participated in many different activities in the meetings, such as: learning about the work of the Royal Commonwealth Society, what the Commonwealth is and have participated in a Model CHOGM. This is where we all represented a different Commonwealth country and had to agree by consensus on a collective way forward on issues such as the Commonwealth's response to COVID-19 and climate change.

Our projects are in the development process at the moment, but I cannot wait to get started!"



Over the next few months the Society looks forward to working with exchange participants to help deliver social action projects that will benefit our communities, deepen Commonwealth connections across borders and make the world a better place.

Marta Rios, Youth Engagement Project Manager at Clarion Futures, said: "Clarion Futures, as a match funder and ambassador of the #iwill Fund, is fully committed to empowering young people to shape decisions, take social action and make a positive difference in our communities. Over the last three years, we have engaged over 1,000 young people in youth social action opportunities and we are very excited about working with the Royal Commonwealth Society on this youth exchange programme. This partnership will open new doors to our young people and support them to campaign and raise awareness on a local, national and global level to tackle key issues affecting society and build a better future."



MORE INFORMATION

Further details about the youth exchange and our partners are available on our website: www.royalcwsociety.org/cwyouthexchange

REGIONAL CO-ORDINATORS FOR 2020-2022 APPOINTED

We are delighted to appoint the following Regional Co-ordinators for Africa, Asia, Australia, Canada, the Caribbean, Europe and the Pacific and look forward to working with them to improve the lives and prospects of all Commonwealth citizens.



AFRICA

Linus O. Omondi

africa@royalcwsociety.org

Linus is an Associate Fellow of the Society from Kenya. He is a writer, poet and singer and is currently the International Programme Coordinator and Founder of the Kenya Voluntary Service Organisation (KVSU). He has previously served as the UNESCO Youth Kenya Chairperson, UNESCO Regional Youth Representative and Secretariat to the Youth Council for Culture and Heritage in Kenya.



ASIA

Dhanesh Basil

asia@royalcwsociety.org

Dhanesh is currently the Director of Youth Affairs for the Royal Commonwealth Society, Malaysia Branch. For the last three years, Dhanesh has also served as the Society's Regional Youth Co-ordinator for Asia. Prior to this, Dhanesh served as Co-ordinator for the Commonwealth Youth Council (CYC) Secretariat, managing the operation and administration of the CYC in Malaysia.



AUSTRALIA

Nick de Bres

australia@royalcwsociety.org

Nick is an Associate Fellow of the Society and strongly believes that if you see something worth doing, you should do it. This ethos has seen him be particularly active in recent years in disability care, youth mental health, fundraising and anti-cyberbullying. Selected by the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade as a New Colombo Plan Scholar and Fellow, he has studied, volunteered and worked in several Commonwealth countries and was recently appointed a New Colombo Plan Ambassador.



CANADA

David Haisell**canada@royalcwsociety.org**

David has served on the board of the Royal Commonwealth Society, Toronto Branch, for the past six years, as well as on Canada's national co-ordinating council. During this time, he has overseen the development of social media and website assets for both organisations and increased their profile and following. David has also worked to promote The Queen's Commonwealth Essay Competition (QCEC) within Canada, building and managing relationships with QCEC entrants and Canada's impressive National Student Commonwealth Forum alumni.



CARIBBEAN

Onika Stellingburg**caribbean@royalcwsociety.org**

Onika is an Associate Fellow of the Society from Guyana. She has 12 years' experience working with young people from diverse backgrounds and communities and has worked with various types of groups, from grass-roots projects to diplomatic engagements. During this period, Onika has served as Unit Leader in the President's Youth Award (Duke of Edinburgh International Award); Project Manager Fellow of the One World Youth Project; and a Board Member for the Caribbean Regional Youth Council.



EUROPE

Daniella Tilbury**europe@royalcwsociety.org**

Daniella is a Gibraltarian educator and sustainable development leader who was the first woman in her country to hold the title of university professor. She was the inaugural Vice-Chancellor and CEO of the University of Gibraltar and, having long been involved in sustainability issues, was appointed Gibraltar's first Commissioner for Sustainable Development in May 2018. Her international scientific and social contributions to sustainable development have also seen her recognised as an honorary Don of St Catharine's College, University of Cambridge. Daniella serves as Secretary to the Royal Commonwealth Society, Gibraltar Branch.



PACIFIC

Elisha Bano**pacific@royalcwsociety.org**

Elisha is an Associate Fellow of the Royal Commonwealth Society from Nadi, Fiji, and has been living in Suva for the past 10 years. She was presented with a Queen's Young Leaders Award in 2015 for using the arts to make young people more aware of issues that affect their communities, through an organisation she created called ACT IT. Elisha is currently the Short Courses Co-ordinating Officer for the University of the South Pacific and is actively involved with various youth groups and non-governmental organisations on a volunteer basis, and focuses on working on communities, human rights, leadership, equality and climate change.

As the Society makes these new appointments, we would like to express our sincere gratitude to Amber Kale, Angela Jeune, Cheryl Belle, Darryl Stevens, Dhanesh Basil, Gideon Commey-Mensah, Hari Om Dahiya, Hillary Briffa, Jack Milne, Jenny Stodola, John Apea, Judith Elson, Libby Ellis, Peter Mann, Ryan Braithwaite and Shivani Wazir Pasrich for

their dedication and commitment to these roles over the last few years. We look forward to their continued engagement in the Society's International Network Support Structure.

**MORE INFORMATION**

Find out more about our International Network:

www.royalcwsociety.org/Pages/Category/branches

AROUND THE COMMONWEALTH

RCS branches around the Commonwealth organise and deliver a variety of activities throughout the year, ranging from Commonwealth Day celebrations, conversational events and Model CHOGMs. Reacting to the COVID-19 pandemic, some have moved their activities online.



Nigeria

On Monday, 14 September, 2020 the Royal Commonwealth Society, Nigeria Branch, hosted their Nigeria Conversation commemorating Nigeria's 60th Independence Day. The live event broadcast by The CABS World TV marked the 10th Anniversary of the branch's Conversation initiative characterized by citizen participation, good governance, rule of law, and other Commonwealth values. Stakeholders from both civil society in Nigeria and across the diaspora, as well as government and diplomatic representatives spoke on issues such as the prospects of youth in nation-building, resilience of Nigeria's diaspora, the importance of education for the girl-child, and sustainable development. Professor Tijjani Mohammed Bande gave his last speech as the President of the United Nations General Assembly at the event, reflecting on his stewardship, international peace and security, the COVID-19 pandemic, and sustainable development. Other notable speakers included Ambassador (Dr) Chris Nonis; Executive Governor of Kebbi State, Atiku Bagudu; Honourable Minister of Women Affairs, Dame (Mrs) Pauline Tallen; Honourable Minister of State for Mines and Steel Development, Dr. Uchechukwu Sampson Ogah; The Deputy British High Commissioner to Nigeria, Gill Atkinson; The Chairman of Nigerian Canadian Business Network, King Wale AdeSanya; and former Ambassador (Mrs) Ifoma Akabogun-Chinwumba.

Hong Kong

The Royal Commonwealth Society congratulates Peter Mann, Chairman of the Royal Commonwealth Society, Hong Kong Branch, for his recent appointment to the Order of the British Empire. Peter was awarded an MBE as part of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II's New Year Honours List 'for services to the Commonwealth Community in Hong Kong and Asia.'

Reflecting on receiving an MBE Peter Mann said:

"I was delighted to receive an MBE in the New Year's Honours List for services to the Commonwealth Community in Hong Kong and Asia. The Commonwealth is a sleeping giant that needs to be awakened and a huge potential force for good in the world. Some of us are working on a project to set up a Commonwealth Trade and Exhibition Centre in Greenwich which lies on the prime meridian in the centre of the 24 time zones where East meets West. I believe 2021 will see a significant revival of the interconnectedness of the Commonwealth network."



UPDATE: RCS INTERNATIONAL MEETING POSTPONED

Due to the ongoing and anticipated future impact of the COVID-19 on Australian and international travel, the RCS International Meeting has been postponed until 2022.

While preparations to welcome you to Melbourne, Victoria, Australia continue, the IM2021 Organising Committee has taken the decision to postpone the RCS International Meeting until April 2022. This difficult decision has been made with the health and safety of delegates in mind and following wide-ranging consultation with stakeholders.

Although this eagerly anticipated gathering of the RCS family will happen later than hoped, the IM2022 will seek to hear from as many voices as possible when delegates are able to convene to renew acquaintances, forge new friendships and discuss our collective activities and the Society's strategic direction. We intend to make this meeting meaningful and rewarding for all those attending and to capture the enthusiasm and uniqueness of what we do.

The theme of the 2022 International Meeting will be based on the four priorities of the Society, which are:

- Connected Communities
- Equality and Inclusion
- Literacy
- The Environment

During the gathering, we will seek to engage delegates to explore, share and collaborate on ideas on how these areas can be addressed at their local level. In the past, the Royal Commonwealth Society's International Meetings have provided an opportunity to celebrate our successes and to offer support in the spirit of the values of the Commonwealth and we look forward to continuing this tradition.



↑ The Gables, home of the Royal Commonwealth Society, Victoria Branch

In keeping with convention, the conference will begin with a Youth Forum based on our four priorities. The specific themes and how this will be delivered will be led by young people, for young people. We will then incorporate the outcomes from this to our broader plans for the RCS family.

The IM2022 programme will feature presentations by Government and Community Leaders, panel discussions and workshops based on some of the challenges we are experiencing across the Commonwealth. There will be space provided for regional breakout and discussion groups that will provide space for feedback, reflection and networking.

The meeting will conclude with suggestions for actions on how to achieve results from the discussions. This will be consolidated into a plan for an update in 12 months, with the results being shared at our next international gathering. We are hoping this will increase participation and make the IM2022 a meaningful experience for all attendees.

Until we are able to come together in Melbourne, we are exploring ways to discuss matters of shared interest and celebrating our centenary with the RCS family in the coming months so stay tuned for more details. See you all - in person - in 2022!

IM2022 Organising Committee

COMING UP IN THE COMMONWEALTH



21 FEBRUARY
**Nominations close for
Commonwealth Youth Council**

8 MARCH
Commonwealth Day

International Women's Day

11 MARCH
RCS Webinar - Road to CHOGM

5 JUNE
World Environment Day



WEEK OF 21 JUNE
26th Commonwealth Heads of
Government Meeting, Kigali, Rwanda

20 TO 22 JUNE
Commonwealth Youth Forum, Intare
Conference Arena

21 TO 23 JUNE
Commonwealth People's Forum,
Ubumwe Grande Hotel

21 TO 22 JUNE
Commonwealth Women's Forum,
Serena Hotel

22 TO 24 JUNE
Commonwealth Business Forum,
Kigali Conference and Exhibition Centre



12 AUGUST
International Youth Day



13 SEPTEMBER
High Commissioners' Banquet, Guildhall

5 OCTOBER
World Teachers Day (United Nations)

1 TO 12 NOVEMBER
COP26, Glasgow

KEEP IN THE CONVERSATION

www.royalcwsociety.org [@RoyalCWSociety](https://twitter.com/RoyalCWSociety) [/RoyalCWSociety](https://www.facebook.com/RoyalCWSociety) [@RoyalCWSociety](https://www.instagram.com/RoyalCWSociety)



CHOGM 2021

25-26 JUNE - KIGALI, RWANDA

Rwanda looks forward to welcoming you for the 26th Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in June, in Kigali.

Events' dates

- Commonwealth Youth Forum: **20-22 June 2021** – **Intare Conference Arena**
- Commonwealth Women's Forum: **21-22 June 2021** – **Serena Hotel**
- Commonwealth People's Forum: **21-23 June 2021** – **Ubumwe Grande Hotel**
- Commonwealth Business Forum: **22-24 June 2021** – **Kigali Conference and Exhibition Centre**
- CHOGM Opening ceremony: **25 June 2021** – **Kigali Convention Centre**

COVID-19 measures

Rwanda has been observing all COVID-19 preventive measures as recommended by the World Health Organisation.

For CHOGM, the country will implement additional measures, including COVID-19 green zoning areas for participants throughout their stay in Rwanda. These precautions include among others:

- Limiting CHOGM green areas only to participants and service providers with proof of negative test results.
- Establishing strict infection prevention control (IPC) measures within CHOGM green areas.

For additional information on COVID-19, kindly visit: www.rbc.gov.rw

Travelers' information

Citizens of all Commonwealth countries get a 30-day free visa upon arrival to Rwanda.

Rwanda, also known as the Country of a Thousand Hills, is open for tourism. While in Rwanda, make sure you plan a tour and discover the country and its people. For more information: www.visitrwanda.com.

Stay connected

- 🌐 www.chogm2021.rw
- 🐦 [@CHOGM2021](https://twitter.com/CHOGM2021)
- 📷 [@chogm2021](https://www.instagram.com/chogm2021)
- 📘 [CHOGM2021](https://www.facebook.com/CHOGM2021)
- 📺 www.youtube.com/channel/UCJ4MQt2FYdUVLIOasAf3EgQ

THE QUEEN'S COMMONWEALTH ESSAY COMPETITION (QCEC) 2020

Citizens from across the Commonwealth take part in the virtual Awards Ceremony to celebrate the achievement of the 2020 QCEC Winners and Runners-up.



Elizabeth Mujawamaliya Johnson and Paul Johnson,
Ineza Foundation, Gasave Public Park Library, Rwanda



Joddie Dennie, Teacher and Associate
Fellow, St Vincent and the Grenadines



Matthew Parris, QCEC Final Panel
Judge 2020, United Kingdom



Kenneth Gyamerah, Teacher
and RCS Associate Fellow, Ghana



Hiya Chowdhury, Writer and
2017 Runner-up, India

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