



ROYAL COMMONWEALTH SOCIETY

# Strategic Plan 2020 - 2025

Royal Commonwealth Society is a registered charity in England and Wales (226748), incorporated by Royal Charter.





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## Welcome from our Vice-Patron, HRH The Duchess of Cornwall



Mario Testino ©

For more than a century and a half, the Royal Commonwealth Society has worked tirelessly to promote both the value, and the values, of the Commonwealth.

It has championed, and continues to champion, human rights, democracy and sustainable development across 54 member states.

I am immensely proud of this venerable institution and honoured to be its Vice-Patron as it embarks on its ambitious plan to dramatically increase its reach to all of the people of the Commonwealth.

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Camilla", written in dark ink on a light background.

## Our Vision

To improve the lives and prospects of all Commonwealth citizens.

## Our Mission

We will take a leading role in achieving a better world for Commonwealth citizens by connecting, convening and equipping people to advance the values of the Commonwealth. The Commonwealth is a voluntary network of 54 nations defined by its shared values and principles, including democracy, rule of law, human rights, equality, respect and understanding, protecting the environment, among others.

## Who we are

The Royal Commonwealth Society is a network of individuals and organisations. Through youth empowerment, education and high-level advocacy, the Society champions the importance of connected communities, literacy, equality and the environment across the Commonwealth.

The Society's unique position within the Commonwealth family allows it to play a pivotal role in convening and connecting the Commonwealth's political and diplomatic representatives, civil society, business and youth leaders, on a wide range of issues. As the oldest charity dedicated to the Commonwealth, the Society occupies a central role in this voluntary network of nations.

Founded in 1868, we are non-partisan, independent of governments and rely on public generosity to achieve our mission. The Society is privileged to have Her Majesty The Queen as our Patron and Her Royal Highness The Duchess of Cornwall as our Vice-Patron. Our President is The Right Honourable the Lord Howell of Guildford and our Vice-Presidents are His Highness the Aga Khan IV and the incumbent Secretary-General of the Commonwealth, The Right Honourable Patricia Scotland QC.



## Our Ambassadors



To help us deliver our mission, we have established an Ambassadorial programme and appointed Geri Horner, David Walliams, Alexandra Burke and Gyles Brandreth as inaugural Ambassadors.

Through their shared passion to create a better world, our Ambassadors will help us engage with a larger audience and increase awareness and visibility of the Society's activities across our four key focus areas.

## Towards a Brighter Future

Over the next five years, we will:

- Act as a trusted convenor and deliver activity in four core areas: connecting communities, promoting literacy, improving equality, and protecting the environment.
- Develop and support youth leaders from across the Commonwealth to help deliver our work and achieve our vision of a better world.
- Assist Commonwealth nations in achieving the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by 2030 through our civil society-led programmes in education, the environment, equality and values-based community work.

Our four key areas are:

1. **Better connected communities**
2. **Improving literacy in the Commonwealth**
3. **A more equal and inclusive Commonwealth**
4. **A greener Commonwealth**

# Better Connected Communities

In this divided world, there has never been a greater need for the Commonwealth's values. Through our high-level events, advocacy and our international network, we champion the power of connected communities, bringing together the peoples and the diaspora of the Commonwealth.

## Our International Network

Our International Network consists of over 60 branches and 1,300 Associate Fellows who are young leaders in their communities. This Network draws from every Commonwealth country, integrating individuals, branches and regions. The reach of this expansive network is unique and essential to achieving our mission.

This Network offers a vital space for mutual support and learning, fellowship and Commonwealth connection. From co-ordinating branch and regional resources to support our programmes, including Royal visits, to harnessing our extensive network of Associate Fellows to provide youth-focussed, community-level activities to disseminate our work, the Society offers a community to collectively build a better Commonwealth future.







### **Our convening role**

The Society is well recognised for our convening role. Formally, the Society serves as the Secretariat to the All Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on the Commonwealth in the UK Parliament, the Council of Commonwealth Societies, and the Commonwealth Youth Gender & Equality Network (CYGEN), which is the leading youth voice for equality in the Commonwealth and recognised by the United Nations. These, and other informal, convening roles enable the Society to bring together policymakers and diplomatic representatives with civil society and youth leaders to advance positive action for change.

### **Promoting Commonwealth values and dialogue**

Through the delivery of high-profile events such as the Commonwealth Service, the UK's largest inter-faith Service, held in the presence of Her Majesty The Queen, the Head of the Commonwealth, and the High Commissioners' Banquet, the Society is able to raise the profile of the Commonwealth and celebrate its shared values, diversity and linkages. Through the organising of youth summits and Model Commonwealth Heads of Government Meetings (CHOGMs), the Society can foster greater understanding of the Commonwealth's role and values, particularly amongst its young people.

For the last five years, the Society has collaborated with the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) to broadcast the Commonwealth Service at Westminster Abbey live on BBC One, the BBC World Service and, for the last two years, the BBC YouTube channel. This collaboration has presented a unique opportunity to reach a greater number of Commonwealth citizens (over 1.7 million in 2020) across the globe, and to focus attention on the Commonwealth. The shared values that define the Commonwealth are of great importance in an increasingly fractured world. Events such as these present a pivotal moment to bring communities together and reflect on those important values.

In the next five years, the Society will:

- **Champion Commonwealth values:** The Society will organize high profile events, contribute to the bi-annual CHOGMs, convene Model CHOGMs, and deliver a broader range of events that connect policymakers and diplomatic representatives with civil society members.
- **Foster dialogue:** Provide cross-Commonwealth exchange opportunities for the Society's International Network and organize cross-border youth forums.
- **Develop young leaders:** Provide opportunities to develop the leadership skills of, and increase the number of, Associate Fellows and other youth leaders.

## Improving Literacy in the Commonwealth

The Society has long been a dedicated champion of literacy, creativity and civic voice. Through its flagship writing programme, The Queen's Commonwealth Essay Competition, which was established in 1883, the Society has provided hundreds of thousands of young people across the Commonwealth with the opportunity to share their story and have their say on global issues, all whilst developing key creative skills.

Each year, entrants must focus their efforts around a theme; something that tackles crucial matters of the day and asks young people to reflect on their world and experiences through a new lens. Recent themes have included peacebuilding, inclusion, the role of youth, and gender equality; drawing out innovative ideas for positive change and encouraging entrants to consider new perspectives. The theme is rooted in Commonwealth values, providing an engaging introduction to the Commonwealth network and allowing young people to explore their own connection to the Commonwealth, whilst fostering an empathetic and open-minded world view.

The Competition has reached over 87,000 young people from nearly every Commonwealth country since 2010.



The Queen's Commonwealth Essay Competition is a unique vehicle for helping young people to develop key literacy skills, increase academic attainment, and reinforce the idea of writing for fun. In the next five years, the Society will build upon this track record by developing a literacy programme that will additionally help Commonwealth nations achieve Goal 4 of the Sustainable Development Goals: Quality Education.

To achieve this, we will:

- **Develop a literacy programme:** The Society will deliver an innovative approach to help improve child literacy skills, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds or marginalised groups, through delivering physical and online workshops that incorporate national as well as international literature.
- **Expand and diversify the reach of The Queen's Commonwealth Essay Competition:** The Society will use our Network to reach a wider range of young people, particularly from diverse backgrounds, and support them to enter.
- **Champion youth voice and elevate stories to a global platform:** Drawing on entries to The Queen's Commonwealth Essay Competition, the Society will curate a collection of youth commentary that will recognise their work on an international stage.





# A More Equal and Inclusive Commonwealth

Over the past decade, the Society has built a strong reputation for its long-term commitment to advancing a Commonwealth approach to promoting equality. The Society is proud to have worked with Commonwealth governments and civil society on increasing equality and reforming discriminatory laws via sensitive and discreet dialogue.

Our goal in the next five years is a Commonwealth where all people are treated equally within their communities and before the law.

To help achieve this we will:

- **Convene dialogues:** Use our unique role to build consensus amongst diverse stakeholders regarding the need to secure equal rights in the Commonwealth.
- **Empower youth leadership:** Provide opportunities to develop young leaders to bring about positive change in their local communities to promote greater equality. As the Secretariat for the Commonwealth Youth Gender & Equality Network (CYGEN), we will grow the size and influence of CYGEN, and empower youth to advocate for a more equal, more inclusive Commonwealth.





# A greener Commonwealth

The Society has played a leading role in the development and delivery of The Queen's Commonwealth Canopy (QCC), the first environmental initiative in Her Majesty The Queen's name, which was launched at the 2015 Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in Malta.

The Queen's Commonwealth Canopy aims to establish a unique network of forest conservation initiatives across the Commonwealth, creating a physical and lasting legacy of Her Majesty The Queen's leadership of, and service to, the Commonwealth and conserving indigenous forests for future generations. To date, 45 Commonwealth countries have dedicated in excess of 11.5 million hectares to this visionary initiative.

This ground-breaking programme will lead the Society's efforts to create a greener, cleaner environment for the Commonwealth's 2.4 billion citizens. In the next five years, the Society will achieve pan-Commonwealth status for the QCC. We will also lead on another Commonwealth priority which is to protect our oceans by combatting plastic pollution.



To achieve this, we will:

- **Secure pan-Commonwealth commitment:** The Society will elicit commitment from all Commonwealth countries to support the QCC.
- **Enhance community-level awareness:** Leverage the Society's international network to promote The Queen's Commonwealth Canopy at community-level and promote environmental conservation efforts.
- **Galvanise community action:** Mobilise our Networks to plant trees and help clean up the oceans across the Commonwealth.

## Our Ambition for 2020 - 2025 in Figures



### COMMUNITIES

5m

Reach 5 million viewers around the world through the Commonwealth Service.

1.5k

Develop 1,500 young leaders through our Networks and youth summits.



### LITERACY

100k

Reach 100,000 entries for The Queen's Commonwealth Essay Competition (QCEC).

10k

Improve 10,000 young people's literacy and creative writing skills.

140

Curate a collection of 140 pieces to mark the 140<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the QCEC.



### EQUALITY

54

Establish a Commonwealth Youth Gender and Equality Network (CYGEN) presence in all 54 Commonwealth countries.

1k

Develop the leadership skills of 1,000 young leaders through CYGEN activities.



### ENVIRONMENT

54

All 54 Commonwealth countries signed up to The Queen's Commonwealth Canopy.

1m

Plant 1 million trees across the Commonwealth.

1m

Pick up 1 million pieces of rubbish from Commonwealth oceans and waterways.





ROYAL COMMONWEALTH SOCIETY

40-41 Pall Mall, London, SW1Y 5JQ

T: +44 (0)20 3727 4300 | E: [communications@royalcwsociety.org](mailto:communications@royalcwsociety.org)

[www.royalcwsociety.org](http://www.royalcwsociety.org)

Instagram, Facebook and Twitter: @RoyalCWSociety