

Independent Forum of Commonwealth Organisations
Quarterly meeting
12th September 2018, 14:00
Royal Over-Seas League
5 Park Place, St. James's, London, SW1A 1LR

In attendance

CO representatives present

Helen Antoniou, Commonwealth Rotary; Terry Bamford, COSW (Commonwealth Organisation for Social Work); Richard Burge, CWEIC (Commonwealth Enterprise and Investment Council); Amy Chan, CPA (Commonwealth Pharmaceutical Association); Bala Chandra, ICwS (Institute of Commonwealth Studies); Catherine Cole, CAM (Commonwealth Association of Museums) (via Skype from 16:00); Geoffrey Davis, ACLALS (Association for Commonwealth Literature and Language Studies); Philippa Drew, TCEN (The Commonwealth Equality Network); Clive Harridge, CAP (Commonwealth Association of Planners); Marianne Haslegrave, COMMAT (Commonwealth Medical Trust); Clive Holland, RLSS (Commonwealth Royal Life-saving Society); Helen Jones, RCS (Royal Commonwealth Society); Andrew Larpent OBE, Chairman, CommonAge; Peter Lindsay (Commonwealth Resilience Forum – invited); Professor Kathleen McCourt, CNMF (Commonwealth Nurses and Midwives Federation); Clive Lawton, CJC (Commonwealth Jewish Council); Nick Maurice, BUILD (Building Understanding through International Links for Development); James Mehigan (FIDH – International Federation of Human Rights Organisations); Neelam Mohan, Secretary, CAPGAN (Commonwealth Association of Paediatric Gastroenterology and Nutrition); Colin Nicholls, CLA (Commonwealth Lawyers Association); Kathleen Nugent, CASTME (Commonwealth Association of Science, Technology and Mathematics Educators); Diana Owen, ROSL (Royal Over-Seas League); Rita Payne, CJA (Commonwealth Journalists Association); Mark Robinson, RT (Round Table); Michael Sayers, CALRAs (Commonwealth Association of Law Reform Agencies); Bhupinder Sandhu, CAPGAN; Deborah Thomas, Soroptimist International; Sue Dale Tunnicliffe, CASTME; Brigid Watson, CLA (Commonwealth Lawyers Association); Nicholas Watts, CAM (Commonwealth Association of Museums) and IFCO; David White, CHRI (Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative); Fadlullah Wilmot, Muslim Aid; Alex Wright, Head of Policy, ACU (Association of Commonwealth Universities); Carl Wright (Emeritus Director, CLGFO; Arif Zaman, CBW (Commonwealth Businesswomen's Association); Junaid Zunaidi, COMSATS (Commission on Science and Technology for Sustainable Development in the South) (via Skype).

Apologies.

Asha Kanwar, COL (Commonwealth of Learning); Peter Oborn CAA (Commonwealth Association of Architects); Peter Williams CCfE (Commonwealth Consultative Forum for Education).
[to be completed]

Others present (Items 1 and 2 only)

Philip Parham CMG	UK Commonwealth Envoy
Louise Ellis	UK FCO Commonwealth Unit Head
Russell Phillips	UK FCO Commonwealth Unit (Deputy Head of institutions and Partnerships)

Please notify nsjwatts@gmail.com of any inaccuracies.

1. Introductions

NW (Chair) opened the session, and welcomed visitors from the FCO's Commonwealth Team.

2. Interaction with FCO's Commonwealth Team

Opening remarks:

Louise Ellis gave an outline of the UK's positive assessment of CHOGM, highlighted some focus areas for the UK's period as Chair-in-Office including increasing Commonwealth cooperation in international fora, girls' education, the Blue Charter, Malaria reduction, reducing blindness, connectivity, and trade. Louise also indicated that the UK has already begun sharing lessons learned with Rwanda, and will be expanding the BHC Kigali in advance of the summit. Inputs from COs would be shared at UNGA on a video-reel display.

Discussion:

During the discussion section Philip usefully summed up the aims of the UK's Chair in Office period:

1. Drive the implementation of the CHOGM commitments to ensure that they deliver real value;
2. Boost the voice of the Commonwealth in international discussions as an advocate for the rules based international system;
3. Increase practical solidarity among Commonwealth countries in international arenas by supporting each other
4. Strengthening ComSec and collaboration between the 3 pillars: Governments, ComSec and the COs.

Philip and Louise took questions from CO representatives present for 30 minutes. They disclosed that the 2020 CHOGM will likely be in October of that year; the FCO is recruiting a partnerships officer to manage relationships with COs and IFCO; UK diplomatic posts have been briefed on CHOGM outcomes and the UK's Commonwealth priorities; smart networks may be a focus for the next CHOGM; a major aim is to strengthen the Commonwealth Secretariat; working with the third pillar including COs is a priority.

CO representatives present noted the excellent access provided at CHOGM 2018 and hoped the UK would actively support similar space being provided at future CHOGMs. Additionally, there was general agreement of COs' support for the proposed Commonwealth Principles on Media Freedom.

Actions:

Louise Ellis to share with **NW** a full list of UK CHOGM spending commitments and programmes.

Louise Ellis to share with **NW** communication details for the Commonwealth Unit/Team.

NW to share the list of projects and contact details with IFCO.

3. ComSec Partnership Strategy

Discussion

There was a general feeling that the new strategy was not aimed at fostering greater partnership working, and suffered from a lack of consultation. The paper also creates confusion around who will be the main ComSec point of contact for COs, which it was agreed is regrettable.

There was an additional discussion on access to Ministerial meetings. There was general agreement that all meetings should, ideally, be open to COs, but caution must be taken in advocating for equality of access that the lowest denominator is not adopted for all.

It was agreed that responding to this paper, as well as other challenges, would be aided by IFCO adopting a more formal structure.

4. Mapping Exercise

It was noted that recent ComSec requests for data from educationally focused organisations had been excessive, and poorly thought out, although the intention may well have been good.

It was agreed that an IFCO mapping exercise should be undertaken independent of ComSec, facilitated by COs sharing data.

Actions:

Steering Group: To formulate the aims and objectives of a mapping exercise, and plan for data sharing between COs and share this for approval by email.

5. Working with Commonwealth Programmes

No discussion

6. Proposal to formalise IFCO

There was general agreement to the merit of formalisation, with the acceptance that there were acknowledged issues still to be finalised. The paper circulated by NW was accepted, and a mandate agreed for the Steering Group to develop concrete proposals to be discussed at the next IFCO meeting. All Commonwealth accredited organisations are encouraged to join IFCO to strengthen the collective voice and areas of collaboration and support. Participation in IFCO is entirely voluntary.

Actions:

Steering Group: to develop a proposal for formalising the structure of IFCO to be circulated in advance of the next IFCO meeting.

7. Clusters

It was agreed that two new clusters be formed. In a discussion led by Catherine Cole of CAM it was agreed that a 'Culture Cluster' be formed, with a core of organisations that are focused on culture, and a set of supportive organisations involved in cultural matters. Clive Harridge of CAP then led a brief discussion of a proposed 'Cities and Urban Areas' cluster.

It was agreed that the two new clusters should be supported with the clusters themselves enjoying relative autonomy to develop. COs were invited to 'sign up' for clusters in their area of expertise and interest. [A more detailed report on this discussion will be circulated in due course.]

8. Announcements

CHEC (EE) announced the inaugural Zena Daysh Memorial Lecture by Sir Mark Tully to be held at ROSL on 13 September 2018.

The CBW (AZ) advised that they would be holding a Social Storm Hackathon to address solutions to SDG4 (Education) and SDG14 (Life under Water) and were looking for mentors.

The ICWS (BC) announced a forthcoming publication on World War One and the Commonwealth. CLA (CN) reported on the CLA publication in partnership with the Commonwealth Secretariat [title to follow]

COL (AK) will be holding PCF9 (Pan-Commonwealth Network for Open Learning) triennial meeting with the OUUK in Edinburgh on the 9-12 September 2019—and would like all the Commonwealth organisations to join them. The theme will be on innovations for quality education and lifelong learning for all (<https://www.facebook.com/notes/commonwealth-of-learning/pcf9-to-be-held-in-edinburgh-during-9-12-september-2019/2451934244829692/>)

CASLE (Susan Spedding, not at meeting) would be holding their inaugural conference to start their 50th Anniversary Year on 14 September at the Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors.

Any overlooked announcements please let nsjwatts@gmail.com know. Please send any additional announcements you would like to have circulated.

9. AOB

There was no other business.

10. Date of next meeting

[At the subsequent meeting of the IFCO Steering Group on 17 September, it was agreed to target 5 December 2018, subject to availability of accommodation. This date tbc.]

Meeting closed 17:05