



# **The Commonwealth Association Annual General Meeting 2021**

**Held Online**

**22 July 2021 12:00 - 13:00**

## **Agenda**

- |                  |   |
|------------------|---|
| 1. 12:00 - 12:05 | Welcome and opening remarks   |
| 2. 12:05 - 12:07 | Apologies for absence - see at end  |
| 3. 12:07 - 12:10 | Housekeeping  |
| 4. 12:10 - 12:12 | Minutes of the 2019 AGM   |
| 5. 12:12 - 12:25 | Chair's report  |
|                  | Questions from the floor on Chair's report<br>and 2020 AGM minutes  |
| 6. 12:25 - 12:30 | Treasurer's report 2020   |
|                  | Questions on the accounts from the floor  |
|                  | Adoption of the accounts  |
| 7. 12.30 - 12.45 | Constitutional amendments. If anyone has<br>questions about the amendments which they would like to raise<br>before the meeting please email <a href="mailto:info@comassoc.org">info@comassoc.org</a> . |
|                  | Proposed procedures for nomination and<br>election  |

8. 12:45 - 12:50

Elections

Nominations were invited with a closing date of 15 July. Details of nominations received will be emailed out on 16 July..

9. 12.50-12.52

Appointment of the auditor

10. AOB

ENDS. There will be a short break before the Patsy Robertson Memorial Lecture.

Apologies for absence should be sent to the Secretary, David Blake, by email [info@comassoc.org](mailto:info@comassoc.org) or by phone 01494 583112 or 07740856948.



**THE COMMONWEALTH ASSOCIATION**  
**Minutes of the Annual General Meeting held online**  
**on 17 November 2020**

- 1 The Chair, Stuart Mole, welcomed members who were present for the meeting.
- 2 **Apologies for absence** were received from Domini Bingham, Chris Bowman, Andrea David Hugh-Kong and Asif Khan.
3. **Housekeeping** Hilary McEwan ran through the procedures for the meeting with regard to the use of the Blue Jeans system for the virtual meeting.
- 4 **Minutes of the 2019 AGM** held on 29 June 2019 were presented. Cheryl Dorall had pointed out that she had not been Secretary since the foundation of the Association, but had held the post between 2009 and 2018. With this correction, the minutes were accepted as a correct record, proposed by Antony Ellman, seconded by Richard Longhurst.
5. **Chair's report.** Stuart Mole noted that most of the report concerned a period when Patsy Robertson was Chair of the Association. There had been a huge outpouring of grief on the occasion of Patsy's death with obituaries appearing in many newspapers and on websites. The Executive Committee agreed that there should be a lasting legacy and the possibilities in this area were being explored.

Stuart highlighted the disruption of our activities caused by both the coronavirus pandemic and the refurbishment of Marlborough House.

Stuart mentioned the Membership of the Executive Committee. Cheryl Dorall had pointed out that the number of positions available for co-opted members was 3, not 2. Retiring members included Dharani Rethnam, who had been on the Committee since its

foundation. She had been the first Secretary and later took on the role of membership officer. She deserved special thanks for all that she had done over the years. Others who were standing down from the Committee included Sherrill Burton, Domini Bingham and William Rezel, all of whom deserved our thanks for their service.

Mention was also made of the website. David Blake had begun work with Prater Raines on a new website for the Association and hoped that it would be complete by the end of the year.

There had been a good deal of work with other organisations, in particular the Independent Forum of Commonwealth Organisations (IFCO), with Bishakha Mukherjee serving on its Steering Committee.

Stuart drew attention to the fact that Zoom gives the Association the ability to do more, especially in connecting members in different countries.

There were no questions or comments and the report was accepted by the meeting, proposed by Cheryl Dorall and seconded by William Rezel.

**6. Treasurer's report.** Richard Sisson presented the accounts for the financial year 2019. Income from subscriptions had been £1,655. Expenditure, mainly for the AGM and networking had been £1,284.82. The balance at the end of the year had been £4,642. 370 excess., balance 4642.

For the period to date in 2020, income had been £1,572 and expenditure just £217. The balance to date was £5,997.24.

The accounts had again been audited by Rickie Sankar.

There were no questions and the accounts were approved, proposed by Amitav Banerji and seconded by Annie Carlton.

**7. Election of officers and Executive Committee** At the closing date, 13 November there candidates for 4 officers and 5 Committee members.

The following were elected:

Chair	Stuart Mole
Vice-Chair	Bishakha Mukherjee
Secretary	David Blake

Treasurer        Richard Sisson

Committee

Members        Shobhna Rattansi, Bobbie Dohunso-Tettey, Godson Okafor , Sharon Robinson and Sreetharan Vallipuram

**8. Election of auditor** Rickie Sankar was proposed as auditor of the accounts by Cheryl Dorall, with Annie Carlton seconding. His election was approved.

**9. Institute of Commonwealth Studies** Stuart spoke about the situation at the Institute of Commonwealth Studies, which was under threat of closure. The University of London was conducting a consultation. The Institute was a unique institution, the only centre for Commonwealth Studies in the world. It was actually profitable with a budget surplus. The Commonwealth community had rallied to its defence and the Association had assisted with the letter to the University from four former Secretaries-General.

Bishakha. Mukherjee spoke about the involvement of IFCO in the process and briefly about the Association's involvement with the organisation, on whose Steering Group she sits.

The meeting was followed by a session entitled ***A Reflection on the life of Patsy Robertson*** who was the Association's founding chair and who held the post until she passed away in August 2020. It consisted of a series of short talks mainly by people who knew or worked with Patsy, including Baroness Scotland, the Commonwealth Secretary-General, Stephen Chan, Dharani Rethnam, Hugh Craft, Cheryl Dorall, Lorna McLaren, Joel Kibazo and Richard Bourne. Patsy's son and daughter John and Sarah Robertson also spoke briefly about their mother.





## THE COMMONWEALTH ASSOCIATION

### **Chair's Report, 2020/2021**

It does not seem a year since our last 'zoom' AGM and, in truth, it is not. Our 2020 AGM was postponed from its usual summer slot both by the COVID-19 pandemic and by the untimely death of our founder and late Chair, Patsy Robertson. This report therefore covers the period of eight months since November 2020 so that we can return to our usual – and constitutionally required – timings of a July AGM. The result of a short year and the continuing restrictions on our activities will therefore make this a briefer report than usual.

#### **1. Remembering Patsy Robertson and other former colleagues**

I am sure that all who knew Patsy will continue to feel her absence. Last November we were able to hold an online celebration of Patsy's life, including her work with the Commonwealth, and the recordings and images of this moving event will have a special place on our new website. A number of members expressed the hope that we could find a lasting way of recognising Patsy's formidable legacy. As a first step, the Executive Committee enthusiastically accepted a proposal that the talk after the AGM, with a guest speaker, should become the annual Patsy Robertson Memorial Lecture. I am therefore delighted that the inaugural lecturer, after the 2021 AGM, will be Dr Anne Gallagher AO, the Director-General of the Commonwealth Foundation.

Sadly, the last eight months have seen the passing of other former colleagues (whether CA members or not) and we hold in our thoughts those we have lost, including Karen McKenzie, (Owek) Joseph Musisi, Brenda Holland and Sanjivi Sundar, and grieve with their families.

#### **2. Renewing our Governance**

##### **a) ExCo's new membership**

Patsy's passing gave me the difficult task of following in her footsteps as the new Chair of the Association. While I am indisputably 'old blood', I am pleased that the Executive Committee has been infused with welcome 'new blood'. Bishakha Mukherjee has been serving since the last AGM as Vice-Chair and has provided invaluable support during that period. Godson Okafor, Shobhna Rattansi and Sree Vallipuram joined the ExCo as elected members last November; and Lorna McLaren (recently retired from ComSec) and Felix Samuel were co-opted to the Committee in the New Year. David Blake is a mainstay of the organisation as the CA's Secretary and Richard Sisson takes care of our finances with the dedication and precision we have come to expect. Sadly, Sharon Robinson has decided to

step down from the Committee, after many years, but has agreed to be our Returning Officer for our annual elections, assisted by Dharani Rethnam. Sharon has always been a galvanising influence and a source of new ideas, and we are very grateful for the long service she has given.

#### **b) Revising the Constitution**

The effect of an Executive Committee refreshed by new membership and the curtailing of the Association's usual activities by the pandemic has led to a focus on 'housekeeping'. Rather as lockdown has led some to paint the garden shed or reorganise the larder, so ExCo has felt that now was the time to consider the internal health of the organisation. Our foundational document, in this respect, is the CA's Constitution. First adopted in June 2003, shortly after the CA's birth, the constitution was revised in 2008 and 2009, but not in the twelve years since. The constitutional revisions which are due to be proposed to the 2021 AGM are, it is hoped, entirely non-controversial and simply involve an updating of the document to reflect recent changes, including the arrival of virtual meetings! There is also a short document on electoral procedures which will be presented for approval. In time-honoured Commonwealth tradition, our decision-making is invariably by consensus, but we are also democrats and we need to be clear about voting arrangements, even if these are rarely used.

#### **c) Officer/Committee responsibilities**

A second 'lockdown' task has been to develop a comprehensive set of role descriptions for the officers of the Association and for elected committee members. This has been a useful exercise in also identifying other necessary roles, including the need for a Membership Officer and for a Returning Officer. As the new website becomes operational, it may be that the work that Shobhna Rattansi is doing alongside David Blake will need to be formalised into a Website Editor (in addition to the Administrator). The full set of responsibilities will be posted on the website once this goes 'live'.

### **3. Communicating with members and supporters**

#### **a) The new website**

A vital but overdue task has been to revamp our website, both as a means of communicating with our membership and also as a dynamic way of presenting our mission to a wider public. Working with Prater Raines, David Blake has taken on the very considerable task of transferring across still valuable material from the old website, writing or commissioning new material, consulting the committee and liaising with our website providers. Latterly, as mentioned above, he has had valuable support from Shobhna Rattansi who will in future be responsible for developing, editing and uploading new content. We expect the new website to be inaugurated at the 2021 AGM.

#### **b) Recruiting and publicity leaflet**

The printed word also still has a place, and a publicity leaflet is in the final stages of production, in anticipation of our return to in-person gatherings and meetings. This will be additionally available in electronic form on the website.

#### **c) Members and supporters**



A major means of communication with members and supporters has been through the 'comassoc' network. This enables David Blake to post news of interest on a regular basis, including articles, media coverage and bereavements. From time to time, the network can also be used for lively debate and comment. Given that this is a 'family' network, the distinction between member and supporter has inevitably become rather blurred. Since some subscribe as members while others prefer a looser arrangement, the Committee felt it would be helpful to clarify the distinction between the two. Our records are therefore being updated to check that annual subscriptions are current and that where there are arrears, these are paid, or membership discontinued. In terms of regular communications, we intend that members in future will receive a dedicated stream of material relating to their membership while there will be a separate channel, for members and supporters, which will contain more general material.

#### **d) Finance**

A heartening feature of the past year has been the way that subscription income has been maintained. Since we have had very little opportunity for expenditure, particularly in hosting in-person events, this has contributed to a very healthy balance sheet at the end of the 2020 financial year. However, significant bills will soon need to be met, for example for the new website, for the publicity leaflet and for added zoom capacity. If we are able to host 'live' events once more, we can expect regular patterns of expenditure to resume, not least in sustaining the new Patsy Robertson Memorial Lecture series, as well as further advocacy projects.

#### **4. Working with Others**

Despite the pandemic, the CA has strengthened its links with partner organisations, including the Commonwealth Secretariat, the Commonwealth Foundation, the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association, The Round Table and others. In particular, the CA (through our representative Bishakha Mukherjee) has been closely involved with the Independent Forum for Commonwealth Organisations (IFCO) in preparatory work for the Rwanda CHOGM (now postponed for a second time). This has involved much drafting and technical input. Either Bishakha or I have been regular attendees at the Secretary-General's periodic consultations with Commonwealth organisations.

#### **5. Tackling Commonwealth issues**

The CA has campaigned on two important issues in recent months. These are:

##### **a) The threatened closure of the Institute of Commonwealth Studies ICwS)**

In the latter part of 2020 (and as reported to the 2020 AGM), the University of London and the School of Advanced Study announced an imminent threat to the existence of the ICwS. The CA immediately joined a coalition of Commonwealth organisations lobbying the University, and others, in opposition to these plans. The Association also supported its Patrons, the four former Commonwealth Secretaries-General, in their own protests against the University's proposals. Despite some early job losses, the campaign recorded a partial success when the University withdrew its immediate threat to the ICwS and announced the appointment of a Review Group, headed by Sir Malcolm Rifkind, to explore the matter further and to report its conclusions by the middle of 2021. The CA has also made



representations to the Review Group and their report is expected to be delivered to the Vice-Chancellor at any moment.

#### **b) Cuts to the UK Development Assistance budget**

During the course of 2020, the UK government announced its intention of resiling from its legal commitment to maintain its annual spending on overseas development assistance at the 0.7% target of GNI set by the United Nations. The UK had met this target for the first time in 2013 and it was enshrined into law in 2015. For its part, the UK government argued that reducing the target to 0.5% of GNI – a cut of £4 billion - was a temporary measure necessitated by abnormal levels of public expenditure resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic. Critics have pointed out that these reductions had an immediate adverse effect on development programmes and were a 'double whammy' – a significant percentage cut in a cake that was already much diminished by a loss of output caused by the pandemic. Among those hardest hit by these cuts will be forty-seven Least Developed Countries, fourteen of whom are Commonwealth members. The pandemic has already had a grievous effect on extreme poverty, girls' education, health and climate change mitigation and these are precisely the areas where significant funding reductions will occur. A majority of donor (DAC) countries have increased, rather than reduced, their development assistance spending in the face of the pandemic, including an 8% increase by Canada. The CA argued to IFCO that this is an issue which we should carry forward to the Rwanda CHOGM and that all Commonwealth countries in a position to do so should step up their support internationally, rather than stepping away from their obligations. Given the postponement of CHOGM for a second time, the opportunities for Commonwealth debate are distant but, at the time of going to press, the UK government has just announced that a parliamentary vote will now be allowed on whether the cuts should be restored.

#### **6. Planning for the Future**

It is not at all certain that there is a clear path out of the pandemic, given the vast global inequalities in vaccination programmes and the spread of new infections. That certainly seems to be the mixed picture within the Commonwealth. In 2020, all 54 Commonwealth countries issued a stirring call to fight the pandemic. It is our hope that the rhetoric will now be followed by concerted action.

We hope for better times and wish continuing strength and resilience to all our members. But whatever 'new normal' materialises, we are likely to emerge into a very different world in many ways.

**Stuart Mole**

Chair

12 July 2021

**The Commonwealth Association**  
**Treasurer's Report 2020**  
**Receipts and Payments Account and Balance Sheet**  
**12 months to 31 December 2020**

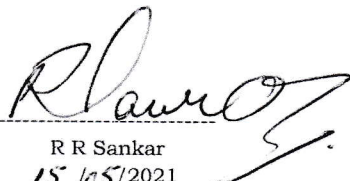
	2020			2019
	General Fund £	Charity Fund £	Total £	£
<b>Receipts</b>				
Subscriptions	1,692.00		<b>1,692.00</b>	1,655.00
Donations	0.00		<b>0.00</b>	0.00
<b>Total Receipts</b>	1,692.00	0.00	<b>1,692.00</b>	1,655.00
<b>Payments</b>				
AGM and networking events	0.00		<b>0.00</b>	1,284.82
Web site	18.00		<b>18.00</b>	0.00
Zoom subscription	143.88		<b>143.88</b>	0.00
Flowers for Patsy Robertson's funeral	55.00		<b>55.00</b>	0.00
<b>Total Payments</b>	216.88	0.00	<b>216.88</b>	1,284.82
<b>Excess receipts over payments / (payments over receipts)</b>	1,475.12	0.00	<b>1,475.12</b>	370.18
<b>Balance Sheet</b>				
<u>Cash at Bank</u>				
HSBC	6,092.24	25.00	<b>6,117.24</b>	4,642.12
<b>Net Assets</b>	6,092.24	25.00	<b>6,117.24</b>	4,642.12
<b>Financed by</b>				
Accumulated Fund brought forward	4,617.12	25.00	<b>4,642.12</b>	4,271.94
Excess receipts over payments / (payments over receipts)	1,475.12	0.00	<b>1,475.12</b>	370.18
<b>Accumulated Fund carried forward</b>	6,092.24	25.00	<b>6,117.24</b>	4,642.12

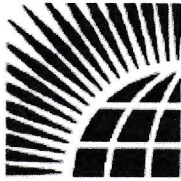
Notes

1. These accounts have been prepared on a cash basis for the period.
2. The subscriptions are paid on a calendar year basis.

Note by the Auditor

This Receipts and Payments Account and Balance Sheet represent a true and fair view of the Association's financial position as at 31 December 2020.

  
R R Sankar  
15/12/2021



# THE COMMONWEALTH ASSOCIATION

## CONSTITUTION OF THE COMMONWEALTH ASSOCIATION

### 1. Name

- 1.1. The Commonwealth Association, hereinafter referred to as "the Association", is hereby established.

### 2. Nature, aims and purposes

- 2.1. The Association is established in London, in the United Kingdom.

- 2.2. The aims and purposes of the Association are:

- (a) to support and promote the values and objectives of the Commonwealth as enunciated in the Singapore Declaration of Commonwealth Principles (1971), the Harare Commonwealth Declaration (1991), and by subsequent Commonwealth Heads of Government Declarations and Statements, including those codified in the Commonwealth Charter of 2012;
- (b) to support the Commonwealth Secretariat as the principal mechanism of inter-governmental co-operation and consultation in the Commonwealth, the Commonwealth Foundation and other Commonwealth organisations;
- (c) to promote the debate of subjects of Commonwealth interest and to advance a positive image of the Commonwealth in all member countries through active involvement with the media, non-governmental organisations, educational institutions and civil society groups whenever the opportunities arise and, where appropriate, through independent activities which complement and do not duplicate the activities of other Commonwealth organisations;
- (d) to provide a social and cultural forum for the pursuit of the common interests of members of the Association;
- (e) to provide a resource base of Commonwealth expertise whether for research, policy development or technical assistance as required;
- (f) to undertake any activities that would be conducive to the promotion and achievement of the aims and purposes set out above and to collaborate with other organisations to that end.



### **3. Membership**

- 3.1. The Association's membership shall be open to all former staff of the Commonwealth Secretariat, whether locally or nationally recruited, and field experts employed under the auspices of the Commonwealth Fund for Technical Co-operation, wherever located. Applicants need to submit a membership form to the Secretary and pay an annual membership fee as determined by the Executive Committee from time to time, and agree to be bound by the provisions of this Constitution.
- 3.2. Membership of the Association shall also be open to former staff of the Commonwealth Foundation and the Commonwealth of Learning, and to former salaried staff of all other accredited Commonwealth organisations and associations.
- 3.3. The granting or withdrawal of membership shall be at the discretion of the Executive Committee.

### **4. Executive Committee**

- 4.1. The Association shall have an Executive Committee which shall comprise the Chair, Vice-Chair, Secretary, Treasurer, Membership Officer, Returning Officer and up to three other elected members, together with up to three members co-opted by the Executive Committee at its discretion, on an annual basis. Each member of the Executive Committee will be expected to play his or her part in furthering the Association's objectives. Specific responsibilities of the officers and members of the Committee are set out separately.
- 4.2. The Association may appoint Patrons who shall be nominated by the Executive Committee and approved by the membership in a General Meeting, supported by two-thirds of those present and voting.
- 4.3. The Executive Committee shall from time to time establish sub-committees for specific purposes, and shall review their appointment and operations annually including receiving accounts for any funds received or expended under delegated powers.
- 4.4. The members of the Executive Committee shall be elected by the membership in a General Meeting for a one-year term. The election procedures will be as separately prescribed by the Executive Committee and endorsed by the membership in a General Meeting.
- 4.5. The affairs of the Association shall be managed by the Executive Committee. Subject to the overall direction of the General Meeting, the Executive Committee may take any action on behalf of the Association which, in its opinion, will further the aims and purposes of the Association.
- 4.6. All questions shall be decided by consensus or by a show of hands, unless a formal vote is requested. In the case of equality of votes, the Chair shall have a second, or casting, vote.
- 4.7. The Executive Committee shall meet not fewer than three times in the calendar year, other than the Annual General Meeting (AGM), and the quorum for the conduct of its business shall be three. Meetings can be held virtually or in person.



- 4.8. Any casual vacancy in the Executive Committee may be filled by the Executive Committee and any person appointed to fill such a vacancy shall hold office until the end of the unexpired term of office being filled and shall be eligible for re-election.

## **5. General Meetings**

- 5.1. An AGM of the members of the Association shall ordinarily be held not later than six months after the end of the financial year, and at such a place or in a virtual format as the Executive Committee shall determine. At least four weeks' notice of the time and place of the AGM shall be given to all members in writing by the Secretary.
- 5.2. At an AGM, the business to be discussed shall include the election of all members of the Executive Committee, the appointment of an auditor, the consideration of the Chair's report, the audited accounts and other matters as may be necessary.
- 5.3. At a General Meeting any matter requiring a decision shall be resolved, so far as is practicable, by consensus or, failing that, by a majority of those present and voting, including those casting proxy votes.
- 5.4. Any member unable to attend a General Meeting in person, and where virtual attendance is not possible, may apply to the Secretary for a proxy vote, to be exercised by a nominated member on his or her behalf only on special resolutions and constitutional amendments for which due notice has been given.
- 5.5. The quorum for the conduct of business at a General Meeting shall be fifteen.

## **6. Financial Arrangements**

- 6.1. Funds collected or raised by subscription for the purposes of the Association shall be deposited in the name of the Association in an account at a bank approved by the Executive Committee.
- 6.2. The Treasurer and the Secretary (or, in his/her absence the Chair) shall jointly operate the account of the Association according to the directions of the Executive Committee.
- 6.3. The Treasurer shall keep proper accounts and report to the Executive Committee at each meeting, and submit an annual financial report and accounts to the AGM.
- 6.4. The financial year shall be from 1 January to 31 December.

## **7. Amendment of the Constitution**

- 7.1. A General Meeting may amend this Constitution by a two-thirds majority of those present and voting. Notice of any amendment must be given at least 21 days in advance.
- 7.2. Special resolutions including constitutional amendments may be proposed by the Executive Committee or by any member, provided that the resolution is duly proposed, seconded and supported by three additional members.

**8. Association Headquarters**

- 8.1. The Association shall be based in London, under arrangements determined by the Executive Committee.

**9. Dissolution**

- 9.1. If the Executive Committee by a two-thirds majority of its elected membership decides at any time that it is necessary or advisable to dissolve the Association, it shall call a meeting of all members of the Association, of which not less than 21 days' notice shall be given, stating the terms of the Motion to be proposed thereat. If the motion is carried unanimously or by no less than a two-thirds majority of those present and voting, the Association shall stand dissolved forthwith and any assets, including funds, held in the name of the Association shall be given or transferred to such other association or institution having aims and purposes similar to those of the Association as the Association may decide at the Meeting by a simple majority of the members present and voting.

Adopted in June 2003 and subsequently amended in July 2008, July 2009 and in July 2021 (proposed)

## COMMONWEALTH ASSOCIATION

### PROPOSED PROCEDURES FOR NOMINATION AND ELECTION

- (a) At least four weeks before the Annual General Meeting, the Secretary shall give notice to all members in writing of the business to be transacted at the AGM and of the elections which are due to take place for office holders and members of the Executive Committee. In inviting nominations, the Secretary shall also circulate a nomination form and a timetable for the receipt of nominations.
- (b) Any member of the Commonwealth Association shall be eligible for nomination (providing that the individual concerned has paid all membership subscriptions that may be owing).
- (c) An eligible member shall be duly nominated if he or she has a proposer and seconder from among the membership and if the nominee has indicated his or her consent to nomination.
- (d) All nominations must be received by the Secretary and conveyed to the CA's Returning Officer (RO) at least 7 days before the Annual General Meeting.
- (f) By close of nominations, if the number of nominations is equivalent to the number of vacancies to be filled, those members nominated shall be presented by the RO to the AGM so that their election can be confirmed by a show of hands.
- (g) If the number of nominations exceeds the vacancies, this will be reported to the AGM by the RO and a ballot shall be held of all members of the Association by a secure electronic system, supervised by the RO and held within 14 days of the AGM. Where there are only two candidates for a single vacancy, members will vote by indicating their support for the candidate of their choice. Where there are three or more candidates for a single vacancy, a preferential system of voting shall be used. The results shall be duly reported by the Secretary to the general membership as soon as voting and counting have been concluded and certified by the RO.
- (h) In the event of a contested election, retiring officeholders/ ExCo members will be asked to continue in post until the results of the election are known and successors determined.

SM

29.06.2021