



THE COMMONWEALTH ASSOCIATION

Staying engaged – promoting and fostering the Commonwealth

NEWSLETTER

<https://www.comassoc.org>

Edition 1, Spring 2025

Message from the Chair, Max Gaylard

Welcome to the inaugural edition of the Commonwealth Association's Newsletter. It seeks to provide an insight into some of the activities being undertaken by the Executive Committee (ExCo) on behalf of the membership to address the Association's primary objective of fostering and promoting Commonwealth ideals and principles.

We hope you will find the first - and longer - edition of the Newsletter interesting and useful and look forward to receiving your feedback to further enhance the Association's work as well as this publication.

SAVE THE DATE: Sonny Ramphal Memorial Service and 5th Patsy Robertson Memorial Lecture (PRML), Tuesday 1 July 2025, Marlborough House



Sonny Ramphal with Queen Elizabeth II

Shridath 'Sonny' Ramphal, the second Commonwealth Secretary-General, died in August 2024 at his home in Barbados. On 1 July 2025, there will be an opportunity for former colleagues, Commonwealth supporters and friends of Sonny to join the UK commemorations of an

extraordinary leader and diplomat who significantly raised the profile and much extended the influence of the modern Commonwealth. In the morning of that day, there will be a **memorial service for Sonny** in the Queen's Chapel, followed by refreshments in Marlborough House.

Later in the afternoon of 1 July, Sir Ronald Sanders, Sonny's son-in-law, will deliver the **5th Patsy Robertson Memorial Lecture**, in which he will assess Sir Shridath's outstanding contribution to international and Commonwealth affairs. A wine reception will follow. **Further details will be available shortly but please save the date.** Space will be limited and tickets will be issued on a first-come, first-served basis.

The Queen's Chapel was the venue for the memorial service of the first Commonwealth Secretary-General, Arnold Smith, in July 1994. There have now been four lectures in memory of our founding Chair, Patsy Robertson. The last one was given by Olympic and Commonwealth champion, Tessa Sanderson CBE, in 2024.



2025 Annual General Meeting (AGM) in June/July

Owing to this year's special commemorations, the **2025 AGM** of the Association will be held online in June or July, on a date to be notified. Although often combined with the hosting of the annual lecture and reception, an online annual business meeting enables a wider pool of members to participate and a full discussion of matters of concern.



Tessa Sanderson DBE, delivering the 4th Patsy Robertson Memorial Lecture, 14 October 2024

Commonwealth Association Youth Award (CAYA) and other collaboration with the Commonwealth Youth Programme (CYP)

The ExCo has continued to forge a strong working relationship with the CYP. To underscore its belief in the importance of young people promoting the core values of the Commonwealth, ExCo is setting up a distinct **Commonwealth Association Youth Award** in partnership with the CYP, and possibly another Commonwealth Accredited Organisation. This award will comprise a modest cash prize to a young journalist whose work promotes just, peaceful and inclusive democratic societies in support of the Commonwealth Charter and UN Sustainable Development Goals. The CAYA will be presented at the triennial meetings of Youth (or Education) Ministers. Apart from a cash prize, the ExCo will provide its expertise in organising the award and selecting candidates.

ExCo's previous collaboration with CYP has included the organisation of the Association's

2023 and 2024 PR Memorial Lectures and setting up a library with archives of past Youth Ministers' Meetings during CYP's 50th anniversary events in 2024.

Membership of Independent Forum of Commonwealth Organisations (IFCO)

An ExCo officer is a member of the **Steering Group of IFCO**, an umbrella organisation of the Commonwealth's Accredited Organisations, which has been operating successfully since 2015 as an informal mechanism for co-ordination and dialogue between the Commonwealth organisations and the Commonwealth Secretariat. This Group meets quarterly to brainstorm and act on critical Commonwealth issues. When USAID was abruptly shut down earlier this year, IFCO co-ordinated a Statement on Global Relationships and Development Assistance, which contains practical recommendations for governments and the Commonwealth Secretariat. The full statement is available at [IFCO-statement-on-development-assistance-1.pdf](#).

CYP's 2025 Commonwealth Youth Awards Ceremony



Stanley Anigbogu, Winner

In March, an ExCo member attended CYP's fascinating annual **Commonwealth Youth Awards for Excellence in Development Work** ceremony at Marlborough House, presided over by Hon Fred Mitchell, Foreign Minister of the Bahamas. The distinguished adjudicating panel selected a pan-Commonwealth as well as regional winners from diverse themes that included technology, health, the environment, and poverty alleviation. The overall **winner** was **Stanley Anigbogu** from Nigeria for his



outstanding work in transforming waste into solar innovations that provide clean energy.

Partnership with Commonwealth Businesswomen's Network (CBWN)

The ExCo works closely with CBWN which focuses on women's economic empowerment. It has worked on a few interesting projects with CBWN and is currently part of the **CBWN delegation for discussions on a Commonwealth Investment Access Facility** endorsed by the 2024 CHOGM in Samoa. The UK will provide seed funding for an investment hub to help small island developing states of the Commonwealth access private finance for capacity building, technical assistance and investment projects identified through a needs assessment.

Commonwealth Day Service and Reception 10 March 2025



Commonwealth Day Service at Westminster Abbey
(Photo by Royal Commonwealth Society)

ExCo members attended the multi-faith **Commonwealth Day Service** at Westminster Abbey and **Reception** at Marlborough House. The **2025 Commonwealth Day** theme was 'Together we thrive'.

The **Service**, a celebration of the diversity and unity of the Commonwealth in the presence of Their Majesties the King and Queen, other Commonwealth dignitaries and guests, featured live multi-faith readings and performances of music, poetry, dance. There was a special performance by Joan Armatrading CBE and her band. The Service was broadcast on television and radio.

The **Commonwealth Day Reception** was well attended by representatives from High Commissions, Accredited Organisations and friends of the Commonwealth. Guests were welcomed by the then Secretary-General Patricia Scotland; the incoming Secretary-General Shirley Botchway was also present. King Charles was the chief guest.

Collaboration with Commonwealth Sport (previously Commonwealth Games Federation)

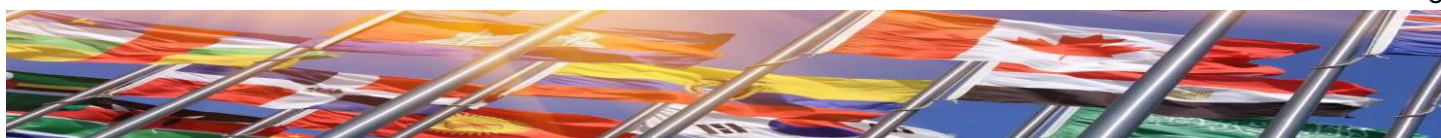
The ExCo has a good working relationship with the Federation, which was rebranded as Commonwealth Sport on Commonwealth Day, 10 March 2025. The collaboration began in 2023 when the future of the Commonwealth Games was in danger and its profile was boosted by the 4th Patsy Robertson Memorial Lecture, delivered by Olympic and Commonwealth Champion, Tessa Sanderson CBE. It is now reinforced with the appointment of an ExCo member to the **Development Committee of Commonwealth Sport**.

King Charles officially launched the inaugural Commonwealth Sport King's Baton Relay for the **Glasgow 2026 Commonwealth Games** on Commonwealth Day 2025. The 2026 Commonwealth Games in Glasgow will be held from 23 July - 2 August, with athletes and para-athletes expected from 74 nations and territories.

Membership of the Commonwealth Communicators Group (CCG)

The Commonwealth Association is a **founder member of the CCG** which was set up by the Secretariat in February 2025 to enhance the Commonwealth's impact, influence and reputation across the 56 Commonwealth member countries and beyond. A member of ExCo attended its inaugural meeting and will continue to contribute to the work of the CCG.

It is hoped that the CCG will comprise communications representatives from the 92 Commonwealth's Accredited and sister organisations, as well as the Secretariat to create a vibrant ecosystem for Commonwealth-related



news, events and campaigns. This group effort is expected to kickstart a powerful means of communicating quickly and effectively across our collective external communications platforms to raise the Commonwealth's profile.

Commonwealth Action on Media Freedom

The Association, through its ExCo, is considering ways to contribute to **the promotion of the Commonwealth Principles on Freedom of Expression and the Role of the Media in Good Governance**, adopted at the 2024 CHOGM in Samoa. A small **working group** with relevant expertise has been formed under the guidance of an ExCo member as well as fellow members Madhuri Bose and Richard Bourne. The group will seek to work in close consultation with the Commonwealth Secretariat, the Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative and the Commonwealth Journalists Association, towards the practical realisation of the afore-mentioned Principles.

Climate Change Representative

Terry Dormer, the Association's Climate Change Representative, is tracking global developments in this area and will continue to brief members periodically. We are in early stages of preparations for an exhibition of Terry's marine photographs. Thanks to those members who helped select the 50 photographs which will be included in the exhibition.

Christmas Social in December 2025

In line with past practice, the **annual Christmas social** will be organised at lunchtime in **early December 2025**. If we continue to use the Atrium at Marlborough House, the number of attendees will be restricted to 30. We welcome any suggestions you may have regarding this annual social gathering.

Update on Membership

The Association's membership of **over 90 members** is comprised of former staff members of the Commonwealth Secretariat and other Commonwealth organisations. The ExCo is continuing to take measures to attract new members. These include having meetings with the new Head of HR and CSSA of the Commonwealth Secretariat and writing to Commonwealth organisations.

ExCo Meetings

The ExCo meets at least quarterly to plan future activities and to follow up on committed plans.

Communication channels

We continue to use our **Google Group, Comassoc**, to circulate news about the Commonwealth and about our members. Members can also send messages directly to the Association's membership by using comassoc@googlegroups.com and do not need to send them through David Blake.

Some of our news stories also go on the Association's **website** - comassoc.org. ExCo members are working to improve the website content and look forward to receiving further contributions from the membership, including those which can be shared under 'Memories Unlocked'.

The CA event videos are available on the **Commonwealth Association YouTube channel**. We are also considering the creation of a CA **Facebook** page.

