



THE COMMONWEALTH ASSOCIATION

Staying engaged – promoting and fostering the Commonwealth

Papers for the 2025 Annual General Meeting

to be held on Friday 25 July 2025
on Zoom

Zoom link

<https://uso2web.zoom.us/j/81027508390?pwd=SVecVTRaaFFRMOOrK6ImjQ9MoWlYnbw.1>

Meeting ID: 810 2750 8390

Passcode: 892637



THE COMMONWEALTH ASSOCIATION

Staying engaged – promoting and fostering the Commonwealth

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING 2025

Online through Zoom

Friday 25 July 2025 Starting at 2.30pm

Agenda

All timings are approximate

1. 1430-1435	Welcome and opening remarks – Max Gaylard
2. 1435-1437	Apologies To be sent to the Secretary, David Blake – email dsblake2004@yahoo.co.uk or by phone on 01494 583112 or 07740856948
3. 1437 – 1442	Minutes of the 2024 Annual General Meeting (circulated with this agenda)
4. 1442 – 1455	Chair's report 2024-2025 (circulated with this agenda) – Max Gaylard Questions from the floor on Chair's report and 2023 AGM minutes
5. 1455-1505	Treasurer's report (Accounts for the financial year 1 January – 31 December 2024 circulated with this agenda) – Richard Sisson Questions on the accounts Adoption of the accounts
6. 1505 – 1515	Elections for Officers and Executive Committee and appointment of the auditor Nominations were invited with a closing date of 18 July. Details of nominations received are attached.
7. 1515 – 1530	Any other business

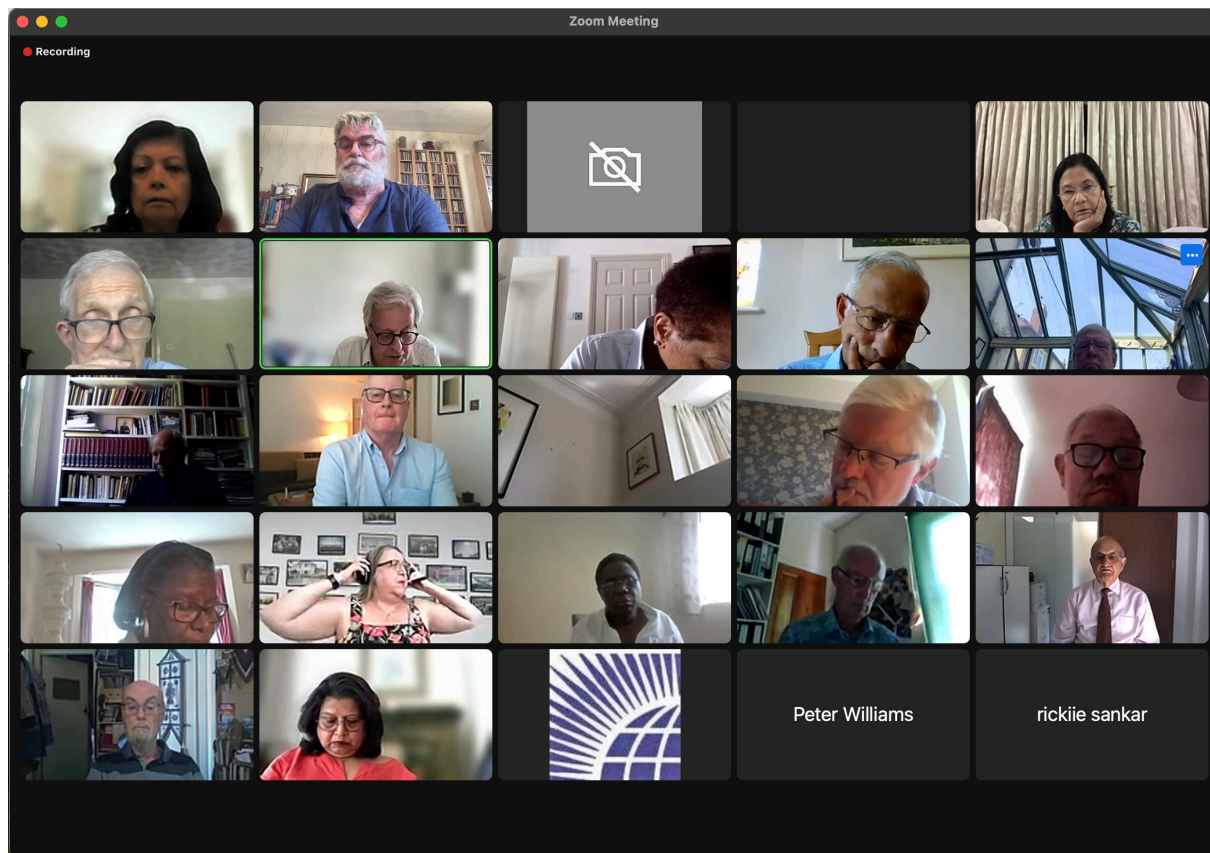


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Minutes of the 2024 Annual General Meeting

Held online using Zoom on 29 July 2024



1. The Chair, Stuart Mole, welcomed members to the online AGM and mentioned the Patsy Robertson Memorial Lecture, which was due to be held on Monday 14 October.

The quorum of 15 for the AGM was met.

2. **Apologies for absence for the AGM** were received from Magna Aidoo, Carmaline Bandara, Domini Bingham, Chandu Krishnan, Sandra Pepera, Dharani Rethnam, Felix Samuel, David White and Carl Wright.

3. Minutes of the 2023 AGM

The minutes of the previous year's meeting, which had been circulated in advance, were accepted by the meeting as a correct record. There were no matters arising which were not covered elsewhere in the agenda.

4. Chair's report

Stuart Mole presented his *Chair's report*, which had been circulated to members in advance. He ran through the report, emphasising the following issues:

- the creation of a section of the website where we can honour those who have passed away. This would be based on the comments submitted by members to Comassoc, our Google Group, but others might also be included.
- the need for contributions from members to the website, in giving news, stories and ideas.
- the role which Matthew Neuhaus would be playing at CHOGM, in providing a daily briefing of events for the website.
- the importance of the Association playing a role in campaigning. Particular issues included sport and Stuart mentioned that our lecturer this year would be Tessa Sanderson. The Association had also been following up the non-publication of the Zimbabwe election report. The Association had also followed up a change in Commonwealth pensions provision, where the usual increase in the supplementary pension did not occur, despite the current high rate of inflation.
- his appreciation for the support which he has had as Vice-Chair for 18 years and 4 years as Chair.

Nicholas Watts thanked the Association for its support for IFCO, mentioned the Comassoc news feed and drew attention to Bishakha's regular, consistent and valued contribution to IFCO's activities. He also mentioned some of the plans for CHOGM. He voiced some criticisms of the report *The Contribution of Commonwealth-Accredited Organisations to Advancing the Commonwealth Charter*.

Considerable concern was expressed by several members about the situation with regard to the Zimbabwe COG report which had still not been released and the new members Togo and Gabon, which they felt had dubious claims to be eligible for membership. Differing opinions on how to deal with the Zimbabwe question were expressed.

The meeting agreed to adopt the report.

5. Treasurer's report

Richard Sisson presented the *Accounts* for 2023. Receipts – our Income - was higher than in previous years, but this was mainly because in addition to subscriptions, we had two special events - the Patsy Robertson tree planting ceremony, which was largely funded by special donations and the AGM, where catering costs were met by the Commonwealth Youth Programme.

In response to a question, Richard said that although membership subscriptions had risen from £1,692 in 2020 to £1,885 in 2021 and £2,055 in 2022, they had fallen to £1,800 in the year under review. Membership is not going up significantly. Very few of the current leavers from the Secretariat have chosen to join the Association. Few of them have an emotional attachment to Marlborough House and we will need to make a hard pitch to boost our numbers.

Adoption of Richard's report was proposed by Karen Brewer, seconded by Mark Robinson and accepted by the meeting.

6. Elections for Officers and Executive Committee and appointment of the auditor

Stuart reported that he had been discussing with Max when new officers should take up post. They had concluded that this should be after the end of the AGM.

Nominations had been received by Dharani Rethnam. There being no other nominations, the following were accepted by the meeting:

POST	NAME	PROPOSED BY	SECONDED BY
Chair	Max Gaylard	Stuart Mole	Amitav Banerji
Vice Chair	Bishakha Mukherjee	Domini Bingham	Carmaline Bandara
Secretary	David Blake	Cheryl Dorall	Richard Bourne

Treasurer	Richard Sisson	Dharani Rethnam	Elizabeth Hinks
Membership Officer	Lorna McLaren	Sharon Robinson	Roy Chalmers
Committee Member 1	Shobhna Rattansi	Raj Gomez	Greg Covington
Committee Member 2	Felix Samuel	Sudesh Thaman	Andrea David-Hugh-Kong
Committee Member 3	Sree Vallipuram	Jennifer Fonseka	William Rezel

Amitav Banerji proposed and Antony Ellman seconded the appointment of Rickie Sankar as Auditor for the Association and the meeting agreed.

No nomination was received for Returning Officer.

7. **Any other business**

On behalf of the Committee, Bishakha expressed our appreciation for all the work which Stuart has done during his four years as Chair. He has been full of ideas and the initiator of many things. He has a huge dedication to the Commonwealth cause and has the ability to encourage colleagues to subtly influence its direction. His chairing skills have been enormous and he has re-energised Exco.

Areas where there have been real achievements as a team have included the development of the Patsy Robertson Memorial Lectures, many of which have had excellent speakers; the tree planting ceremony; the revised constitution for the Association; the new website; strengthened links with other organisations, including the Secretariat, IFCO, the Round Table, the Commonwealth Youth Programme and the Institute of Commonwealth Studies.



THE COMMONWEALTH ASSOCIATION

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ANNUAL REPORT 2024/2025

For presentation to the Annual General Meeting on 25 July 2025

INTRODUCTION

From Max Gaylard, Chair



Max Gaylard

The last twelve months have been particularly busy and eventful for Commonwealth affairs at large, highlighted by: the biennial Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) in Samoa in October 2024; the departure of Baroness Scotland of the United Kingdom and arrival of the Honourable Shirley Botchwey as Commonwealth Secretary-General; and the Service of Thanksgiving and celebration for the life of second Commonwealth Secretary-General Sir Shridath 'Sonny' Ramphal.

I take this opportunity to thank all members of our Association as it approaches a quarter century of life and activities, and in particular an Executive Committee (ExCo) which is dedicated, active and purposeful.

OUR MEMBERS

For a change, the year under review has seen just a small number of our members, supporters and former colleagues pass away. The most prominent of those was

undoubtedly Sir Shridath Ramphal, who passed away in August 2024. The others have included Janet Singh, Mwambu Wanandeya, Alistair Niven and Missouri Sherman-Peter.

We are pleased to report that the number of fully paid up members of the Association is the highest it has been for many years. This is mainly due to the fact that several members have renewed their subscription following a period of absence – see below. The number of new members from the Secretariat is still disappointingly low. The Executive Committee is continuing its efforts to rectify this, including by holding meetings with the Chair of the CSSA as well as with the recently appointed Head of HR.

For some time the ExCo has been aware that a number of people have remained on our emailing list, despite the fact that they have not paid their subscriptions. As this is one of the benefits of membership, this seems unfair on those who have diligently paid their subscription every year, many by standing order. The Committee decided that action was needed and agreed to prune our mailing list. In February we decided to give these people another chance by sending them a final individual reminder. A number of people then paid their 2025 subscription and are back on the books! We did not ask for arrears, but a few offered to pay them without being asked.

The result was that at the end of April 31 people were removed from our mailing list

- 8 who last paid their subs before 2014
- 5 who last paid their subs in 2014
- 3 who last paid their subs in 2015
- 6 who last paid their subs in 2016
- 2 who last paid their subs in 2017
- 2 who last paid their subs in 2018
- 3 who last paid their subs in 2019
- 2 who last paid their subs in 2020

These people no longer receive emails from the Association and are not able to participate in our activities. If they start paying again, they will be able to resume their membership.

HOW WE ARE GOVERNED

The Association is managed by its Executive Committee. The last AGM saw a major change in just one respect, with the election of Max Gaylard as our Chair, taking over from Stuart Mole, who had been Chair since the passing of Patsy Robertson in August 2020 and Vice-Chair for many years before that. We are very grateful to Stuart for all he has done and pleased that he agreed to be co-opted to the Committee to provide assistance in times of need. Institutional memory is important in an organisation such as ours!

The committee consisted of Dr Bishakha Mukherjee (Vice-Chair), David Blake (Secretary), Felix Samuel, Lorna McLaren (Membership Officer), Max Gaylard (Chair), Richard Sisson (Treasurer), Rickie Sankar, Shobhna Rattansi, Sreetharan Vallipuram and Stuart Mole (co-opted).

FINANCES

The Association's financial year is the calendar year, from January to December. The latest accounts are for 2024 and these are being circulated with this report. Our treasurer Richard Sisson will outline the highlights at the AGM and be pleased to answer any questions which members may have.

EVENTS

The two major events of the year have continued to be our AGM and the Patsy Robertson Memorial Lecture, which are usually held on the same day, although in recent years the AGM has sometimes, as this year, been held online.

Patsy Robertson Memorial Lectures

During the period under review there have in fact been two Patsy Robertson Memorial Lectures.

Tessa Sanderson CBE – *Sport, Development and the Commonwealth*

In October 2024 Tessa Sanderson CBE spoke about her career in athletics, in which the Commonwealth played a major part. On this occasion the quality of the video provided by the Secretariat was not high enough for us to use.

The text of Tessa's lecture is available [here](#) and the Powerpoint slideshow can be viewed [here](#).

Sir Ronald Sanders – *The legacy of Sir Shridath Sonny Ramphal*



The Queen's Chapel

1 July 2025 saw two events celebrating the life and work of the second Commonwealth Secretary-General, Sir Shridath 'Sonny' Ramphal. In the morning the Queen's Chapel, which is part of St James's Palace and backs onto Marlborough House, witnessed a memorial service for Sonny which featured music and tributes from two people who knew him well – his younger daughter Amanda and his successor as Secretary-General, Chief Emeka Anyaoku. The full text of their tributes are available through the website. We were pleased to welcome members of the Ramphal family and a number of special guests, including David Lammy, the UK Foreign Secretary, Baroness Scotland, who was representing King Charles III, and the new Commonwealth Secretary-General, the Hon Shirley Botchwey. A number of Association members who live outside the UK were also present, including Hugh Craft from Australia, who spoke at the Lecture and Matthew Neuhaus also from Australia.



The audience for the lecture



Members of the Ramphal family



Sir Ronald Sanders



And a good time was had by all after the lecture

In the afternoon, Sonny's son-in-law, Sir Ronald Sanders, gave the Fifth Patsy Robertson Memorial Lecture on Sonny's legacy. This was the best-attended lecture so far in the series, with about 100 attendees and a total of about 130 if the morning service is included. A video of the lecture can be viewed on our website, where a fuller account of the day can be found, including some photographs.

Christmas Social

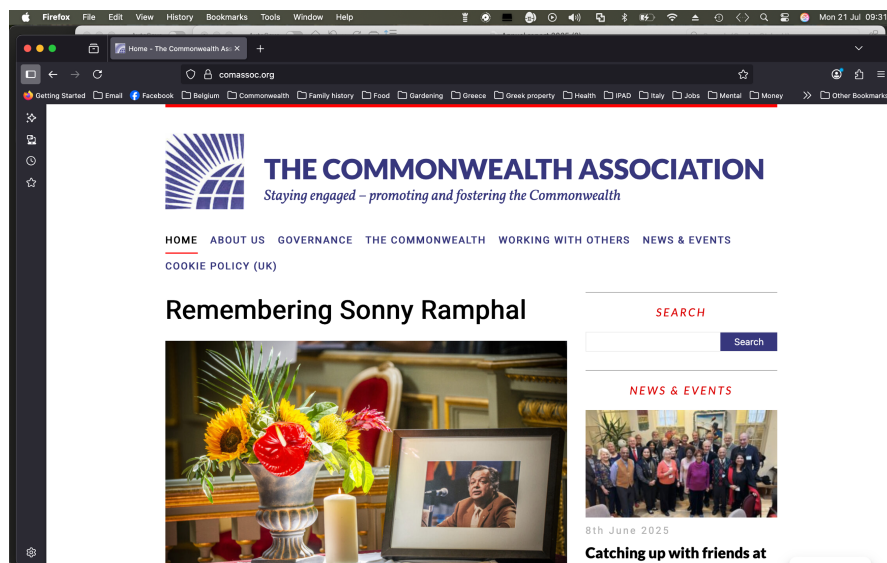
The Association held its usual Christmas Social at the beginning of December 2024, in the Atrium at Marlborough House. We were pleased to welcome Gail LaRose, a former Comsec staff member, who lives in Canada.



COMMUNICATION

With everyone and anyone

Website – comassoc.org



The website continues to be a major avenue for communication with members and the outside world and a place where the Association's activities and achievements can be recorded for all to see.

A major purpose of the website since its inception has been to provide a record of our activities as an Association and the very varied doings of the Commonwealth Secretariat. Amongst our digital records we have discovered a range of resources which give a good picture of what has been done and where possible we are putting these on the website. Many of them are related to our annual general meetings, which have featured a large number of prominent Commonwealth people.

Recent additions to the Annual General Meetings part of the website have included:

- a Powerpoint presentation of pictures of events during the first 50 years of the Secretariat's existence, which was shown at the 2015 Annual General Meeting. Entitled *The Commonwealth story through staff eyes – an unfinished story*
- The audio of a speech from Professor Richard Drayton, Rhodes Professor of Imperial History at King's College London, who spoke to us at the 2013 AGM on 'The Commonwealth in the 21st Century'.
- A speech from Baroness Scotland at our 2014 AGM, before she became Commonwealth Secretary-General. It includes a glowing seven-minute introduction from Patsy Robertson, whose rich Jamaican accent was a wonder to behold.

YouTube

The Association's *Youtube* channel is where we store the videos which we produce, mainly recording our events. The latest one is Sir Ron Sanders' 2025 lecture. Earlier ones include a number of videos from the Patsy Robertson tree planting ceremony and earlier lectures.

COMMUNICATION

With our members and amongst ourselves

Our Google Group - Comassoc

Comassoc, our Google group, remains the main way of communicating among and between members. During the year under review, 248 messages were sent on a wide variety of topics and many of them led to a good amount of discussion.

Some members seem to feel that they have to channel their comments or new topics for discussion through the Secretary. This is not the case. The group is **your** forum for discussion and the only restriction is that topics must be related in some way to the Commonwealth. To submit an email, just send it to comassoc@googlegroups.com.

Newsletter

Earlier this year the Executive Committee decided to begin a regular newsletter for members which would inform them, in one place, of what is happening within the Association. The first issue of the newsletter was issued in April and contained 14 stories. We aim to issue the said newsletter every quarter.

PARTNERSHIPS WITH OTHERS

Commonwealth Communicators' Group (CCG)

The CCG, which was set up by the Commonwealth Secretariat in February 2025, comprises communications representatives from Commonwealth-accredited and sister organisations and the Secretariat to enhance the Commonwealth's profile, impact, influence and

reputation across its 56 member countries and beyond. It aims to promote a more collaborative way of working among the Commonwealth Accredited Organisations (AOs) as well as between the AOs and the Commonwealth Secretariat.

As a founder member of the CCG, the Commonwealth Association is represented by a member of ExCo at its quarterly meetings. To date our representatives have been Shobhna Rattansi and Sree Vallipuram.

The CCG's Vision Statement, which sets out how CCG members hope to work together to achieve tangible impact, is in the process of being finalised and future activities are under consideration. It is hoped that an increasing number of AOs will participate in the CCG and create a vibrant ecosystem for Commonwealth-related news, events and campaigns which can be publicised through their communication platforms.

Commonwealth Day

It is normal practice for the Association to be invited to send a representative to the two annual events which mark Commonwealth Day on the first Monday in March, this year 10 March. This year our representatives were Rickie Sankar at the Service in Westminster Abbey and Sree Vallipuram who attended the Commonwealth Day Reception in Marlborough House.

COMMONWEALTH HEADS OF GOVERNMENT MEETING CHOGM 2024

LETTER FROM APIA – MATTHEW NEUHAUS SENDS DAILY BLOG FROM CHOGM

Letter from Apia



The 2024 Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting was held in October in Samoa. It was not feasible for anyone from within the Executive Committee to make the long trip there, but Matthew Neuhaus, now living back home in Australia, was scheduled to attend and agreed to send a daily briefing to keep our members up to date with each day's happenings from his point of view.

Matthew's briefings were posted to our website and can be viewed at:

<https://comassoc.org/letter-from-apia-matthew-neuhaus-sends-daily-blog-from-chogm/>

Commonwealth Secretariat

The Association continued to be accredited to the Commonwealth Secretariat and this year it received a *Certificate of Appreciation* for its work and the right to use a special badge for its accredited status.

The Association was represented at a range of meetings held within Marlborough House, including a welcome meeting for the new Secretary-General, the Hon. Shirley Botchway.

Commonwealth Sport



Our Vice-Chair, Dr Bishakha Mukherjee, is a member of the Development Committee of Commonwealth Sport (rebranded as of Commonwealth Day this year, from the earlier Commonwealth Games Federation). Glasgow will be the host city for the 2026 Games to be held from Thursday 23rd July to Sunday 2nd August 2026. Preparations are in full swing. Following the withdrawal of Queensland to host the Games, a reset of the Games was undertaken and endorsed by CHOGM 2024. This included, inter alia, significantly reducing hosting costs (by 60%) in order to enable more and new countries to bid. Governments will no longer be expected to provide a full financial underwrite of the Games. As a result of the new strategy, several Commonwealth countries have already offered to host the Games in 2030 and beyond. This is a very positive reflection on the sustainable and exciting future ahead for Commonwealth Sport.

On Commonwealth Day this year, the Commonwealth Games Federation changed its public brand name to Commonwealth Sport. This brand development signifies the organisation's transition from a 'Sports Federation' to a 'Sports Movement'. Today, Commonwealth Sport is far more than the curator of the Games. As a cornerstone of the Commonwealth itself, a dynamic sporting movement – driven by its values of Humanity, Equality and Destiny – has a key role to play in an energised, engaged and active Commonwealth.

The terms of reference of the Development Committee are available at

<https://resources.cwg-qbr.pulselive.com/qbr-commonwealth-games/document/2024/10/03/574c8615-736d-4627-85c4-4398a2943528/Development-Committee-Terms-of-Reference.pdf>

Independent Forum for Commonwealth Organisations (IFCO)



Our Vice-Chair, Dr Bishakha Mukherjee, continues to be the CA's capable representative on the Steering Group of the Independent Forum for Commonwealth Organisations (IFCO). Dr Nicholas Watts, the Chair of IFCO, is of course the group's founder and highly effective chair, as well as being a CA member. 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.

IFCO is also undergoing a review of its governance arrangements. Prior to its establishment in 2015, there were several attempts to form similar co-ordination and consultative bodies for Commonwealth accredited organisations. In responding to that continuing need, IFCO has proved more resilient and effective than its predecessors and its role now merits further development. The arrival of a new Commonwealth Secretary-General and changes in the leadership of the Commonwealth Foundation present a fresh opportunity for IFCO to secure Commonwealth accreditation, broaden its base and enhance its role in relation to the intergovernmental Commonwealth.

Other On-Going Initiatives

- (1) Environment and Climate Action:** The ExCo was pleased to invite Terry Dormer, ex Commonwealth Secretariat and a long-time member of our Association, to lead and represent the Association on climate action initiatives, with a particular focus on the health or otherwise of global coral reefs and the denizens of those environments. On behalf of the CA membership, we aim to add our voice to what actions need to be taken, including through exhibitions of Terry's wonderful photographic record, and published materials.
- (2) Promotion of Sustainable Development Goals (SDG's):** The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, adopted by all UN Member States in 2015, provides a shared blueprint for achieving equitable and sustainable development and calls for continued action to achieve peace and prosperity by 2030. However, as progress across the globe remains alarmingly off-track, less than 20% of the goals may be achieved by 2030. Commonwealth countries' performance is mixed.

The Exco through Vice Chair Bishakha Mukherjee and Committee member Shobhna Rattansi is tracking developments in relation to the achievement of the SDGs in Commonwealth countries. This team has produced its first brief report which provides an overview of the status of SDGs in member states. It draws on 2022 and

2025 UN data to assess the overall progress in Commonwealth member states in the aftermath of the global pandemic and a major retreat by some leading aid donors. We aim to provide further updates in subsequent reports.

(3) Democracy Dialogue:

The modern Commonwealth has placed central importance on democracy, particularly since the Singapore Declaration of 1971 which outlines its core values and principles. More recently, the Commonwealth Charter of 2013 reaffirmed the commitment of member States to the development of free and democratic societies including enforcement of the rule of law and human rights, freedom of the media, as well as the promotion of peace and prosperity to improve the lives of all the people of the Commonwealth. The Charter also acknowledges the role of civil society in supporting the goals and values of the Commonwealth.

Sadly in recent years the very foundations of democracy are under threat including in member countries of the Commonwealth. It is thus imperative to address the threats to democratic societies and ways of combatting them. Thus a Democracy Dialogue in the form of a series of hybrid (in-person and on-line) conversations is being planned with key players in Commonwealth member countries including elected representatives, members of both print and digital media, members of electoral commissions and civil society organisations. The overall objective is to develop a range of recommendations which may be placed before Commonwealth fora for discussion and further action.



THE COMMONWEALTH ASSOCIATION

Staying engaged – promoting and fostering the Commonwealth

**The Commonwealth Association
Treasurer's Report 2024
Receipts and Payments Account and Balance Sheet
12 months to 31 December 2024**

	General Fund £	2024 Charity Fund £	Total £	2023 £
Receipts				
Subscriptions	2,395.00		2,395.00	1,800.00
Donations to Patsy Robertson tree-planting reception	0.00		0.00	1,040.00
Total Receipts	2,395.00	0.00	2,395.00	2,840.00
Payments				
Web site	384.00		384.00	336.24
Zoom subscription	311.76		311.76	287.76
Patsy Robertson tree-planting reception	0.00		0.00	2,037.55
AGM - held by Zoom in 2024	0.00		0.00	785.27
Patsy Robertson lecture	1,554.77		1,554.77	0.00
December Social	238.63		238.63	340.97
CHOGM representative expenses	500.00		500.00	
Bank charges	66.40		66.40	78.80
Total Payments	3,055.56	0.00	3,055.56	3,866.59
Excess receipts over payments / (payments over receipts)	(660.56)	0.00	(660.56)	(1,026.59)
Balance Sheet				
<u>Cash at Bank</u>				
HSBC	4,859.92	25.00	4,884.92	5,650.48
Creditors	0.00	0.00	0.00	105.00
Net Assets	4,859.92	25.00	4,884.92	5,545.48

Financed by

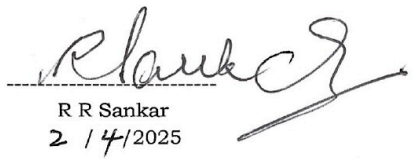
Accumulated Fund brought forward	5,520.48	25.00	5,545.48	6,572.07
Excess receipts over payments / (payments over receipts)	(660.56)	0.00	(660.56)	(1,026.59)
Accumulated Fund carried forward	4,859.92	25.00	4,884.92	5,545.48

Notes

1. These accounts have been prepared on a cash basis for the period.
2. The subscriptions are paid on a calendar year basis.
3. The Association has committed to spend up to £1.500 every 3 or 4 years to support a Commonwealth Youth Award.

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 2024.


R R Sankar

2 / 4 / 2025



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Nominations received

POST	NAME	PROPOSED BY	SECONDED BY
CHAIR	Max Gaylard	Dr Mohan Kaul	Greta Fernandes
VICE CHAIR	Dr Bishakha Mukherjee	Cheryl Dorall	Carmaline Bandara
SECRETARY	David Blake	Amitav Banerji	Richard Bourne
TREASURER	Richard Sisson	Mushtaq Zaman	Raja Gomez
MEMBERSHIP OFFICER	Lorna McLaren	Jane Wonham (Cole)	Sharon Robinson
COMMITTEE MEMBER 1	Shobhna Rattansi	Dharani Rethnam	Greg Covington
COMMITTEE MEMBER 2	Felix Samuel	Catherine Price	Terry Dormer
COMMITTEE MEMBER 3	Sree Vallipuram	William Rezel	Sudesh Thaman

