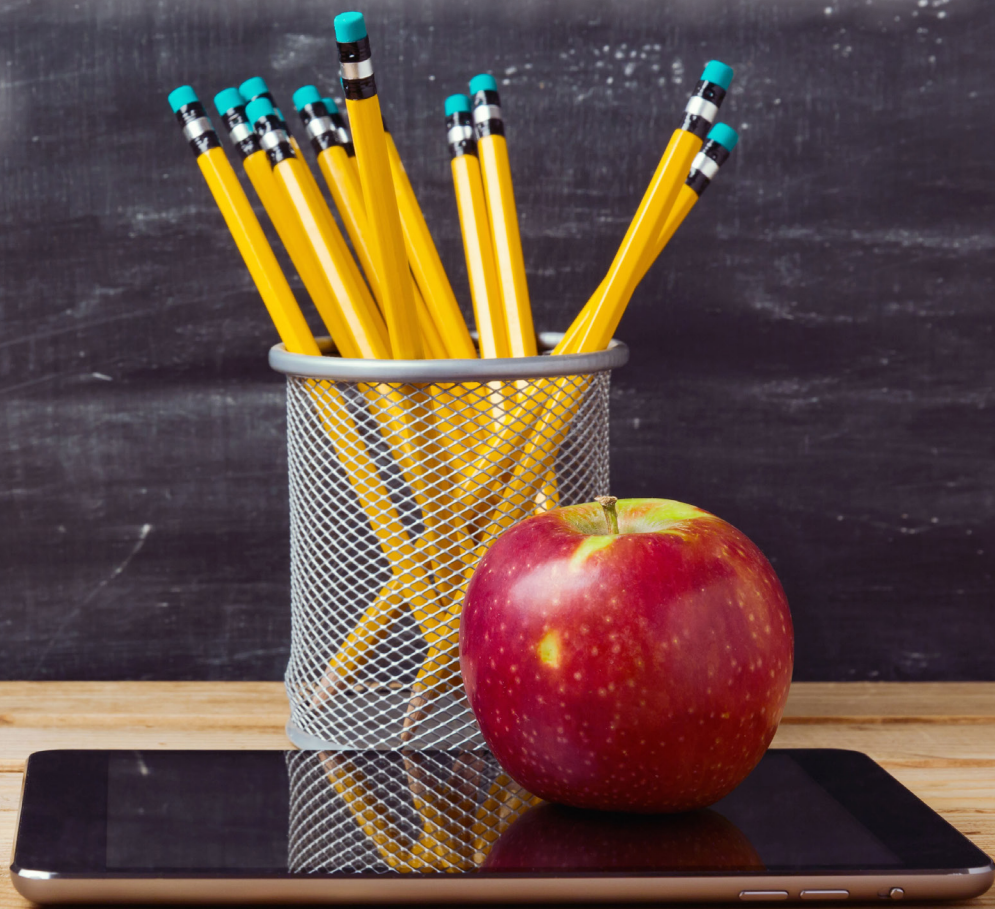




COMMONWEALTH



Saved by the Bell

UK school children's understanding of the Commonwealth

by Tim Hewish with Charlie Brooker

*Forewords by Frank Field MP
& Rt Hon. Lord Howell of Guildford*



/Commonwealth Exchange/

Commonwealth Exchange (CX) is a think tank that promotes the trading, educational, and strategic potential of the Commonwealth in the UK. It does so through the publication of research papers, the production of seminars, and the creation of introductory trade guides.

Its chairman is Lord Howell, Commonwealth Minister 2010-12. It is also assisted by a cross-party advisory board and supported by a wide range of benefactors. Its report on Commonwealth immigration and visa in the UK received world wide media coverage and was supported by the Mayor of London, Boris Johnson, who kindly wrote the foreword.

/Royal Commonwealth Society/

A history in common, a future in progress.

The Royal Commonwealth Society, founded in 1868, is a network of individuals and organisations committed to improving the lives and prospects of Commonwealth citizens across the world.

Through youth empowerment, education and advocacy, the Royal Commonwealth Society promotes the value and the values of the Commonwealth. We champion human rights, democracy and sustainable development across the 53 member states which are intrinsically linked through their common history and shared values.

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/Foreword – Frank Field MP/

I have been a supporter of the Commonwealth for many years and seen the successes it has made in university education through Commonwealth Scholarships allowing young, bright Commonwealth citizens to study in the UK.

However, there has been less focus on teaching the Commonwealth to younger people. That is why I welcome this timely report from Commonwealth Exchange and the Royal Commonwealth Society that sheds light on how the Commonwealth is taught and understood at primary and secondary levels.

The report shows clearly that young Britons' lack of comprehension of the Commonwealth is a cause for concern, but its recommendations offer policy-makers an action plan to reverse the trend.

The Commonwealth is a global network that young Britons should have better access to through the recent and great proliferation of technology. Linking schools across the Commonwealth can provide the initial conduit.

For me, young people at school in the UK need to hear the Commonwealth story – one that is of stirring wonder and adventure. It must lift young Britons' horizons to see Commonwealth nations as a source of opportunity and prosperity. Doing so will also dispel out-dated conceptions of Africa, Asia, the Caribbean and the Pacific.

This report is a catalyst for new and modern Commonwealth school materials that will engage the younger generation not just in the UK but can be used in all Commonwealth nations.

The Commonwealth should be more of a mainstay in the curriculum. The report's recommendations campaign for using the latest technology to create a *Commonwealth App* and *Commonwealth Chat* that allows young people the chance to connect directly around the Commonwealth. These ideas should be enthusiastically pursued.

Past British governments have been ambivalent about the Commonwealth in education and in other matters too. I hope the current government will support new materials for teachers and pupils. The Government must follow up its warm words about the Commonwealth with action. By doing so it will help maintain the UK's soft power and turn a generation of young Britons into mini Commonwealth ambassadors.

I believe in the Commonwealth's ability for renewal. And here is one route for that renewal.

Frank Field MP



/Foreword – Lord Howell of Guildford/

After the first question in the eager young mind as it forms – Who am I? – comes the next question, Who are we, or where do we belong? The answers of course are British and in Britain, but then comes the further crucial and demanding query, just what does that mean?

School ought be the place where the answer and explanation to that takes shape, but here the story line falters. The fear, based on research, is that in far too many classrooms there is only the dimmest grasp of the British identity in a complex, fast-changing and heavily interdependent world. In as far as there is a message it is too often that we belong somehow in Europe or we belong with America and the West, or most negative of all, that we, the British, simply no longer have a distinctive role or purpose.

Copious on-line and hard copy materials flow through British schools affirming, or at best not contradicting, this picture. A bit of history may suggest a different past, but that is brushed into the margins or confined to a few yellowing pages about yesterday's British Commonwealth and empire. The extraordinary present and future for Britain as part of the Commonwealth barely gets a mention despite being woven and bound by a thousand threads into the enormous modern network of nations across all the world.

The time has come for this to be corrected. A general wish that there should be more Commonwealth education in British schools has long been around in policy circles. But there it seems to stop. The wish has failed to give birth to the ideas or the actions to make it happen. This must change. The two authors of this paper now provide the detailed ways in which a new interactive awareness between pupils and students across the whole Commonwealth can be developed and spread.

Central to their thinking is that the very latest teaching technologies must be recruited to the task. Instant on-line connection between classes in schools throughout the Commonwealth, however distant geographically they may be, has now replaced the long wait for replies from overseas or the blurred slides and movies about distant lands and cultures.

The balance and emphasis need changing, too. Human rights, shared values and the rule of law are central elements in the modern Commonwealth story. But so, too, increasingly, are trade and investment, security co-operation and the potentially immense power of the softer and more influential kind which membership of the modern Commonwealth network provides for Britain – or ought to provide if it was more widely understood and appreciated by those in authority.

That starts with children from their earliest years and carries on through the teenage phase right up to higher education levels. It is a narrative with old links but also many new and unfolding features in a digitally transformed world. Its re-telling in vivid new ways to the younger generation is long overdue.

Lord David Howell



/Executive Summary/

Knowledge about the Commonwealth and its place in the world has drifted and become rudderless. Awareness of the Commonwealth in young Britons is at a low ebb. This is where the meaning of this report's title – *Saved by the Bell* – comes into play: *rescued by a timely intervention*. That is what is required.

Polling commissioned for this report shows that only 50% of young Britons know that the Queen is the Head of the Commonwealth; seven in ten do not have a friend in a Commonwealth country; only 7% can correctly identify the Commonwealth flag; nearly half have not learnt about the Commonwealth in school; and under one in four can correctly identify three Commonwealth nations.

The Commonwealth matters because it is in the UK's DNA. Crucially, this is not an appeal to history. It is about connecting the UK to the wider world, which is critical to children's growth and development as global citizens. The Commonwealth requires a more permanent place in UK schools. The UK's connection with the Commonwealth does endure latently, but this is often untapped and unexplored by schools and their pupils.

Above all, teaching the Commonwealth must not be political. The Commonwealth is a network of 2.3 billion people and we encourage more young people to become a part – through greater interaction. We are too often unfamiliar, some might say ignorant, of what goes on in Commonwealth nations, what is important to them, and how we might be able to work together.

There will be those who say that there is simply no time in the syllabus. This is a valid concern, especially when there are insufficient modern Commonwealth materials for teachers and pupils alike. Our policy recommendations aim to rectify this.

In the early days of the Commonwealth, communications were archaic by today's standards. Technological advancement has made connecting with the Commonwealth much easier. The internet has brought the Commonwealth within touching distance in an affordable and instantaneous way. Our recommendations will reflect this change.

To conclude, the Commonwealth in many respects is closer than ever before through technological advancements, but in the minds (and some would say hearts) of UK school children it is the furthest away that it has ever been. Engagement is critically needed if Britain is to wake up and recover its proper place in the increasingly relevant network of Commonwealth nations.

Teaching the Commonwealth in UK schools – a history

We provide an overview of how the topic of the Commonwealth has been taught in schools from the 1950s up until the present day. There have been tensions around who should educate young Britons on the Commonwealth and how this should be done. In fact, these issues remain unresolved.

Of note, until recently there was a Commonwealth Youth Exchange, and the 1990s saw the demise of the Commonwealth Linking Trust and its pen pal scheme. The early 2000s saw the closure of the Commonwealth Institute, which had a statutory aim of educating young Britons about the Commonwealth.

In the 15 years that followed we have seen two Commonwealth Games in Manchester and Glasgow but the expensive materials offered have lacked depth and durability. The latest resource, produced by the Royal Commonwealth Society in 2010, although the strongest yet, is now outdated and in need of reform.

[An extended history section can be found on page 12](#)

Polling of UK school children

In 2015 the Royal Commonwealth Society and Commonwealth Exchange commissioned polling to ascertain young Britons' (aged 8 to 15) understanding of the Commonwealth. This provided a current snapshot of how young Britons see the Commonwealth.

[An extended polling section can be found on page 22](#)

Q1. Do you know what this is the flag for? (The Commonwealth flag was shown)

- Only 7% of children could identify that the flag was that of the Commonwealth, with 5% thinking it was the UN flag. Nearly 80% could not identify it at all. Although the Commonwealth is more than a flag, having an iconic and recognisable image is part of strong brand awareness. It is clear the Commonwealth has not been able to create an image with which young Britons can identify.



Q2. Have you learnt about the Commonwealth in any of these lessons at school? (Eight lessons plus other options given.)

- Nearly 50% of children polled said that they have not learnt about the Commonwealth at all in school. There was also a noticeable split between year groups. Primary school pupils (aged 8–11) were more likely to lack Commonwealth teaching (54%) than secondary school pupils aged 12 to 15 (39%).
- Only 6% of total respondents claimed to have learnt about the Commonwealth in Citizenship lessons despite it being included in Key Stage (KS) 3. The figure did double in Year 9, but this still only amounts to just over one in ten children.

Q3. Who do you think is Head of the Commonwealth? (Six options given plus “none of these” and “I don’t know”.)

- On first glance it would appear that young Britons are rather knowledgeable about Her Majesty the Queen being Head of the Commonwealth. This is in direct contrast to children's knowledge about the flag. Half of those polled could correctly name the Queen. However, nearly 40% weren't able to guess who is Head of the Commonwealth.
- Yet, despite the initial 50% figure from this poll, we looked at past polling commissioned by the Royal Commonwealth Society in 2010 that asked the same question but to 18–25-year-olds and 35+-year-olds. Among the younger age group, 57% correctly selected the Queen, while a significant 75% did so in the older age group. This may indicate that knowledge of the Commonwealth is diminishing over the generations, which would be a trend of considerable concern.

Q4. Which of these countries do you think are part of the Commonwealth? (Eight options given plus “I don’t know”.)

- We had hoped that young Britons would be able to select at least three correct nations. Unfortunately, under a quarter could correctly identify three members (23%). If young Britons are unable to identify Commonwealth nations, they will struggle to grasp the broader and more nuanced concepts and opportunities surrounding the Commonwealth and its people.

Q5. Do you have any friends who you know live in any of these Commonwealth countries?

- We posed this question to young Britons because we wanted to ascertain whether they had a Commonwealth connection outside the UK who was not a family member.
- We found that 71% of British school children do not have a Commonwealth friend. This is a major concern for an institution in which 60% of the population is under the age of 30. Among those polled, 13% had an Australian friend, followed by 8% with a Canadian friend and 4% with a South African friend.
- However, geographic variations in Britain were noticeable. India was joint highest at 10% in London compared to a national share of 3%, while Pakistani links saw a 7% figure (2% nationally) and Nigeria registered with 6% (2% nationally).

Recommendations

I Update Commonwealth curriculum resources

Finding a home for the Commonwealth

We acknowledge the increased strain on teaching time, with numerous subjects vying for the same space. The Commonwealth as a topic has been demoted and often ignored through a combination of little lesson time and a lack of modern, technology-infused resources.

Three reasons why the Commonwealth should be in the curriculum

- to enhance global citizenship and understanding of the UK's soft power
- to dispel the myth that the Commonwealth is outdated
- to connect young Commonwealth people together.

How could the Commonwealth be taught?

The current focus of Commonwealth materials appears to centre around the Games and the Day. This one-off annual or quadrennial exposure to the Commonwealth lacks depth and breadth. Expanding the coverage of teaching focus would ensure that children's understanding of the Commonwealth adds up to more than simply knowing about the Games.



We propose teaching the Commonwealth in ways that utilises digital platforms in:

Citizenship

Incorporating the Commonwealth into Citizenship is not a revolutionary idea; the Commonwealth already has a small place on the syllabus. Citizenship has the advantage of being a compulsory lesson in KS3, so it provides an ideal space for children between the ages of 11 and 14 to approach the subject of the Commonwealth. A school with three 12-week terms could allow for three lessons to be given over to the Commonwealth in Citizenship lessons over the course of a year.

ICT twinned to Citizenship

We propose a Commonwealth Newsroom project, which could link effectively with ICT lessons. Pupils would select a Commonwealth nation and report its news back to the class. The session could culminate with a radio, TV, or newspaper presentation on the chosen nation. This would break down the Anglo-European-centric media to which children are often exposed. This would not only educate and entertain but also establish real intrigue about the various Commonwealth cultures and societies.

History

The Commonwealth deserves a place in schools' History timetables, but this does come with caveats. We do not want to see the Commonwealth taught as something of and from the past. If it is portrayed only in this way then the teaching will reinforce the relic label to yet another generation of young Britons. Properly managed space (three lessons) should be given over to the Commonwealth's contributions in the world wars as well as the decolonisation period.

Geography

We do not wish to be too prescriptive in Geography as the Commonwealth's international nature opens up the possibility of covering numerous geographical phenomena such as rivers, earthquakes, volcanoes, and urban geography to name but a few. However, there could be three specific lessons given over to learning about the Commonwealth diaspora, the development of the Commonwealth and its current economic and environmental challenges, and the overall physical geography of the Commonwealth.

II Create a Commonwealth app

There is currently no app related exclusively to the Commonwealth. This is a huge missed opportunity, given that:

- seven in ten UK children aged 5–15 have access to a tablet, which is an increase from 51% to 71% between 2013 and 2014;
- usage of tablets in the same age group increased 20% from 2013 to 2014, from 42% to 62%;
- ownership of tablets in 5–15-year-olds in 2014 had almost doubled to one in three compared to one in five in 2013;
- In 2014 children were almost twice as likely to go online using a tablet (42% versus 23%) than in 2013, and this is matched through online use via mobile phones.

This shows that mobiles and tablets are becoming a more important mainstay of young Britons' digital activity. Having a Commonwealth space on these platforms would allow an opportunity for young people to learn about the Commonwealth in ways that they regularly, and increasingly, use.

- Furthermore, research from the British Educational Suppliers Association on tablets has shown that tablet device use in UK primary and secondary schools rose 70% from 2012 to 2014, with a further projected rise from 430,000 to almost 900,000 between 2014 and 2016.

Other app benefits include:

- easy to navigate, with a swipe or touch of a button;
- can be updated quickly and easily, avoiding the costs involved in reprinting updated versions of hard-copy textbooks;
- can function with interactive white boards in schools;
- suitable for school and home use.

We can see that the general trend and mood is that this technology is here to stay and will continue to be integrated into the way in which subjects are taught at school. Any delay will mean that the Commonwealth falls behind again, thereby lowering young Britons' chance to discover the Commonwealth on their own technological terms.



What should the app look like?

The app could have syllabus content to assist with Citizenship lessons at KS3 as well as History, Geography, and beyond, but also more elementary information for those being introduced to the Commonwealth at a primary school level through our Commonwealth Chat initiative.

It could have news stories from around the Commonwealth to present a creative way to offer content by putting information in "the today" while also illuminating a current mood of a specific nation, not just a snapshot of learnt facts. The ability to present all this information under one "roof" – or rather in a child's pocket or school bag – makes this prospect far more achievable.

III Reintroduce a Commonwealth pen pal scheme (Commonwealth Chat)

- We propose that a modern pen pal scheme – Commonwealth Chat – is piloted in UK primary schools nationwide for Year 5 pupils. We suggest pupils aged 10 because they will be able to communicate effectively in written English without prompting from a teacher.
- In the past, in the era of exclusively postal communications, messages took weeks if not months to reach their destinations, as did replies. Since the late 1990s email, mobile phones, smart phones, tablets, and social media have all emerged and the world has changed beyond recognition.
- These advances have brought the people of the Commonwealth closer than ever before. Those from the Commonwealth's emerging and developing economies are sharing in these spoils. Communication is now cheaper, easier, and quicker.
- Crucially, the language that unites the Commonwealth is English. It provides an opportunity for those outside the UK to test their English skills with other young people from around the Commonwealth. Through Commonwealth Chat, children would have the opportunity to talk about their lives, family, music, TV, films, sports, lessons at school, and many more subjects.
- The school-linking element is critical in terms of delivery. With no central body such as the Commonwealth Linking Trust of old, there will have to be another mechanism in place to fulfil this role and protect students online. By trialling this project through schools that participate in the Royal Commonwealth Society's Queen's Commonwealth Essay Competition, which is the oldest writing competition in the world, it will be possible to run the pilot in a trusted and safe environment.
- We also do not want this to be a one-off. The aim is to make Commonwealth Chat a mainstay in the Year 5 curriculum. Every 10-year-old whose school adopts the scheme should have the opportunity to have a Commonwealth friend. The overarching rationale for the scheme is that it will make the Commonwealth connection live.

IV Design an attainable Commonwealth Youth Exchange programme

- There is no substitute for actually seeing a Commonwealth nation. We can, of course, utilise modern technological advancements, but visiting is the ultimate Commonwealth connection.
- However, any calls for a full restoration of previous exchange schemes with state-sponsored funds will find a near impossible task. A short-term solution would be to try to resurrect the scheme by offering it on a smaller-scale, individual basis to a handful of students in schools, requiring them to fundraise for themselves. It might well be easier financially for UK pupils to visit other Commonwealth schools, rather than the other way around. This is not ideal, but in our view it is more favourable to have a version of an exchange than none at all.
- A partial solution could be to build links between two Commonwealth schools, perhaps using the British Council's Schools Online. If the schools forge a regular partnership, this could encompass annual trips between a number of selected pupils.
- The longer-term goal would be to look for a government funding mechanism to restore the programme to its previous heights. The Commonwealth Secretariat could provide some of its funding to youth exchanges, as could the Commonwealth Education Trust. Another option is the next Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in Malta, through which a new fund could be set up from existing sources.



V Establish a Commonwealth graduate careers fair

We propose a higher education policy oriented around work or business – a graduate careers fair. This would be a small scale but achievable policy that would invite large businesses to participate in a careers fair similar to those that take place in universities up and down the country each year, but with a specific focus on Commonwealth markets.

This would provide a two-fold benefit:

1. For graduates it would open up the prospect of working abroad but in an environment that has identifiable similarities with British methods. It would lift graduates' horizons from the shores of the UK and Europe, towards more global ambitions.
2. For businesses, it would offer the opportunity to recruit from a pool of highly skilled graduates of British universities for careers in international operations in Commonwealth nations. Furthermore, selecting Commonwealth citizens who attended British universities allows employers to secure the knowledge and expertise of individuals who have experience in two markets.

We suggest a roll-out to Russell Group universities that show an interest. The University of Warwick already has an international careers fair – thus a Commonwealth variant could be trialled.

Conclusion

We have clearly shown why young Britons' education about the Commonwealth needs to be addressed. Our polling demonstrates that their understanding of this network of 2.3 billion people from all across the world is low. The potential of the Commonwealth is its young population – with 60% of the 2.3 billion aged under 30. Therefore, if the UK is to interact with the Commonwealth, it should start in schools, not government circles.

The Government must not be ambivalent to Commonwealth learning. It cannot allow British pupils to leave school with a one-sided or isolated view of the world. The same must be said of other Commonwealth organisations. The Commonwealth functions best when it is human, connected, and decentralised. We have endeavoured to provide a modern path for young Britons to tap, swipe, and click their way to a great new Commonwealth discovery.



/Introduction: Why Teach about the Commonwealth?/

We chose the phrase “saved by the bell” for the title of this report for a specific reason. Knowledge about the Commonwealth and its place in the world has drifted and become rudderless. This situation is particularly acute in UK schools. Knowledge of the Commonwealth in young Britons is at a low ebb. This presents the problem inherent in expecting them to utilise this network of nations without even understanding its basics. This is where the title’s meaning comes in play – rescued by a timely intervention. We endeavour, through the course of this report, to help advocate for such a move.

The Commonwealth matters because it is in the UK’s DNA. It has been and continues to be a significant part of our island story both in the past and now. Crucially, this report is not an appeal to history. The Commonwealth should be a part of young people’s present and future. It is about connecting the UK to the wider world. This is critical to school children’s growth and development as global citizens. Learning about, understanding, witnessing, or visiting our diverse and dynamic Commonwealth provides a multitude of perspectives, but these opportunities are currently not easily available to children. The Commonwealth is a collection of 2.3 billion individuals of numerous cultures, creeds, and peoples that spans all habitable continents.

The Commonwealth cannot just be about the Commonwealth Games or Commonwealth Day to young people, as has been the case in the recent past. It requires a more permanent place in UK schools. The UK’s connection with the Commonwealth does endure latently, but this is often untapped and unexplored by schools and their pupils. We wish to awaken this dormant area of study and exploration.

The educational project must not be political. It must remain apolitical to stave off any accusations of misuse or propaganda. The Commonwealth does not have a parliament, nor are its structures geared to be overtly political. It is a network that we encourage more young people to become a part of – importantly, through greater interaction. The Commonwealth is not an echo chamber of the UN and it is more than its Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM). Rather, it is about grassroots connections with Commonwealth citizens in numerous walks of life such as trade, business, education, health, law, journalism, music, and sport. Reducing it to political forums and politicians is an unhelpful way to present it. Instead, it should be seen as a decentralised and multi-faceted network.

Moreover, the UK has what is described as a “Commonwealth within” due to relatively recent immigration flows. We are fortunate to have such an array of nationalities. However, this asset has not been applied fully towards an appreciation of the wider Commonwealth. We are too often unfamiliar, some might say ignorant, of what goes on in Commonwealth nations, what is important to them, and how we might be able to work together. Young Britons must acquaint themselves with Commonwealth news and people in order to be better global citizens.

There will be those who say that there is simply no time in the syllabus to learn about the Commonwealth. We acknowledge that teachers are often under pressure to fit everything in. This is a valid concern, especially when there are insufficient modern Commonwealth materials for teachers and pupils alike. We will advocate for ways to make things easier. However, the Commonwealth is in the secondary school curriculum for Citizenship so space can legitimately be made. The greater flexibilities in the Academy and Free School systems also provide opportunities for teachers.

We also urge that new educational materials look at incorporating trade, prosperity, and development issues into Commonwealth studies. The Commonwealth should not just be viewed as a human rights organisation. We should want prosperity to flourish between its nations and peoples. This will not happen if the focus remains solely on the “friendly games” or CHOGM communiqués – the tangible value of which is hard to discern. Increased interaction through trade provides the power to lift people out of poverty. UK children must learn about the difficulties but also the possibilities and opportunities of Commonwealth trade. Doing so requires knowledge and information. Schools can offer such a space.

Furthermore, education is not meant to involve just facts and figures. It isn’t so important that children learn that there are 53 nations in the Commonwealth or when Commonwealth Day takes place. Education should be participatory and interactive. The Commonwealth as a platform can provide both.

In the early days of the Commonwealth, communications were archaic by today’s standards, and technological advancement has made connecting with the Commonwealth so much easier. This second wave of the “annihilation of distance” through the internet has brought the Commonwealth within touching distance, often in an affordable and instantaneous way. Our recommendations will reflect this change.



As for the report itself, we have undertaken commercial polling to ascertain UK school pupils’ understanding of the Commonwealth. We have done so to document the existing levels of knowledge and to understand the efforts needed to transform children’s association with the Commonwealth. We have also charted the materials offered to school children from the 1950s to the present day and have explained the loss of many valuable Commonwealth organisations and programmes that assisted UK schools. This is vital if we are to learn about what went before, what works, and the options for reform.

The final section of the report offers a number of recommendations across primary, secondary, and tertiary education based on our research into past materials and schemes. These include the restoration of the Commonwealth pen pal scheme to make it fit for 2015 and the social media environment; a fully developed and modern lesson plan with downloadable materials for Commonwealth teaching; an attainable version of the pupil exchange programme; the creation of a Commonwealth app for use inside and outside the classroom; and a Commonwealth graduate careers fair.

Taken together this report advocates for the Commonwealth to have a well-founded space and strong set of materials across subjects in the national curriculum that the Government should support. The UK cannot afford to allow its young to leave school without hearing the Commonwealth’s story and learning about its potential. The Commonwealth, in many respects, has become closer than ever before through technological advancements, but in the minds (and some would say hearts) of UK school children it is the furthest away that it has ever been. Engagement is critically needed if Britain is to wake up and recover its proper place in the increasingly relevant network of Commonwealth nations.



/Teaching the Commonwealth in UK Schools: A History, 1950s–2010s/

In this section we aim to provide an overview of how the topic of the Commonwealth has been taught in schools from the 1950s up until the present day. From our research it would appear that this story is somewhat patchy, as a significant part of the materials remain missing. Additionally, there have been tensions around who should educate young Britons on the Commonwealth and how this should be done. In fact, these issues remain unresolved. For ease we have presented the narrative in decades to allow the reader a chronological understanding of events.

1950s

In UK schools in this era, there appeared to be a focus on teaching the Commonwealth in History and Geography very much as part of the UK's island story. At this time the Commonwealth Secretariat (ComSec) had not yet been established and many Commonwealth nations were not yet independent. The Imperial Institute changed its name to the Commonwealth Institute in 1958. This organisation plays a significant role in this story, as it would become one of the principal actors in Commonwealth education in the UK until its demise in the early 2000s.

It is also imperative to note that there was no such thing as a national curriculum as we would understand it today. Schools had a large degree of freedom over what was taught. Because of this the Commonwealth as a concept would have been interpreted in a number of ways. Materials on the Commonwealth were not abundant.

One major example was *Commonwealth Geographies* (1956), for secondary school pupils. It was extremely detailed in terms of facts; however, the language was terminally outdated – one example referred to the story of “Captain Cook and the Blackfellows”.¹ The illustrations used to show Commonwealth peoples are equally outdated. Many school children of the 1950s would have gained knowledge of the Commonwealth in this context.

However, there is little to gain from applying a withering modern criticism to a book that can only stand still in time. It would not be helpful to refer to this text other than to highlight the considerable amount of economic and social advancement that has taken place in the 60 years since.

1960s

This decade brought a greater focus on teaching the Commonwealth in schools – a focus that went as high as government circles. The most relevant example is a senior report released in 1961 by the Board of Education in the Ministry of Education whose foreword was written by the then Secretary of State for Education, David Eccles MP. Schools and the Commonwealth neatly summarised the issues of concern and argued for a greater focus on the Commonwealth in History and Geography. It is poignant that Mr. Eccles admitted:

“At school I learned a great deal about Ancient Greece and Rome, but practically nothing about the Commonwealth, except the Australian test cricketers’ names.”²

The report acknowledged that the Commonwealth was bound to have competing claims for inclusion in the curriculum. What was true then is certainly true now. The Commonwealth as a topic will have to vie for selection despite its admission to the current national curriculum at Key Stage (KS) 3 in Citizenship.

As for the 1960s teaching itself, the report makes clear that in the old GCE system the Commonwealth was taught in History in one form or another as an optional subject and at several stages at the advanced level. Again, this narrow focus on history, teaching the Commonwealth as the past not the present or the future, is inherently unhelpful in 2015. Interestingly, the report states:

“20th Century communications have annihilated distance and overcome frontiers, until we are all near neighbours... we can no longer be ignorant of our neighbour... though they may live on the other side of the earth.”³

This 50-year-old acknowledgement does not have the advantage of foresight to see how the 21st-century technological revolution would bring the Commonwealth and indeed the world closer together with cheap air travel, smart phones, and the internet with its multi-faceted possibilities, such as emails, Facebook, Twitter, Skype, YouTube, WhatsApp, BBM, Snapchat, and Google+ Hangouts, to name a few. The possibilities for greater Commonwealth interaction between young people in classrooms or elsewhere are



abundant. What is required is an education policy on the Commonwealth that is fit for 2015 and beyond and that taps into and utilises these technological advancements.

The 1961 report admitted that the pressures of timetabling in schools were combined with an unfamiliarity with the sources, information, and materials available. This was also twinned with what was claimed to be a “general ignorance” of what the Commonwealth meant, how it was to be achieved, and what it represented. Ironically these problems of the 1960s are in fact readily discernible today. That is why we take the view that the present report is paramount in addressing these needs.

Interestingly, *Schools and the Commonwealth* identified that a number of schools were undertaking large-scale correspondence with children from other Commonwealth nations despite the little attention given to such studies. It noted that opportunities for young people to see other Commonwealth countries were not easily come by, acknowledging the physical distance but also the low numbers coming to the UK. Before World War II some maintained schools had a number of journeys to Commonwealth nations overseas. In 1960 considerations of expense made these trips “almost impossible”.⁴ As we will see, in later decades efforts were made with the Commonwealth Youth Exchange, but that is no longer operational with cost being cited as the major stumbling block.

Two important points were made in the report. The first was that teachers and materials:

“Should not convey the idea that all people living in countries still not fully developed are primitive... teachers must be aware that there is rapid change.”⁵

Although phrases such as “primitive” are outdated, the underlying point still stands. A significant number of materials that we have uncovered, even some within the past 20 years, have an outmoded fashion of implying that those in emerging and developing nations continue to live a pre-modern existence. People who have visited Commonwealth cities have seen significant development since the 1990s. This must be conveyed in any new materials circulated in schools.

The second point related to accusations of propaganda. The 1961 report argued that choice or selection of materials must not involve tampering with the evidence. A renewed focus in schools would be about equipping future citizens with a genuine understanding of the Commonwealth, which is essential to global citizenship. Such a view needs to be preserved in any new iteration.

1970s

In the 1970s the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) produced annual catalogues of Commonwealth materials available to schools and the public.⁶ These exhaustive lists rarely changed throughout the years and even subsequent decades. The uptake and use of these catalogues is difficult to discern; however, of importance in determining what resources existed at the time was the exhaustive list of organisations at the back.

The establishment of the Commonwealth Youth Exchange Council in 1970 advanced two-way exchanges between the UK and other Commonwealth nations. The Council helped over 1,700 young people to go on a total of 102 exchange visits in the 1970s. Fast-forward to the 1980s and the totals increased incrementally to over 2,000 pupils on 105 exchanges. The Council's more recent history and loss of funding will be explained in later sections, although it is clear that these sorts of programmes made the Commonwealth tangible and relevant to young Britons.

Another group was the Commonwealth Linking Trust. It linked schools together from around the Commonwealth and educational materials, such as personal letters, were exchanged. This later developed into a Commonwealth pen friend mechanism that no longer exists but that we will argue should be resuscitated in a 21st-century format. Again, no such organisation currently exists.

The League for Exchange of Commonwealth Teachers is a much older organisation, having been established over a hundred years ago. It originally mainly focused on Old Commonwealth nations but added Jamaica and Kenya in the 1960s and then numerous Caribbean nations and Singapore in the 1970s. At the time it was financed by the UK's Department for Education, and exchanges lasted a year and were between teachers of the same subjects. Later decades saw the dilution of the scheme, which further undermined Commonwealth understanding for pupils and teachers alike.

In 1976 the decision was taken to make the second Monday of March every year Commonwealth Day. The rationale was that this was a time in the year when all Commonwealth school children would be in a school term. It would also ensure the day was not a sterile, political affair but one that could be enjoyed by children and adults alike and ensure a sustainable future for the Commonwealth.⁷ One outcome of this was the Department of Education partnering with the Institute to produce a *Teacher's Guide to the Commonwealth* in 1978.



1980s

This new trend continued during the 1980s. Instead of there being a focus on history and geography, much more was made of instilling Commonwealth ideas and knowledge through Commonwealth Day. A further example was the 1985 *Commonwealth Day: A Resource Book for Schools*, published by the Institute. As expected, these materials were distributed to schools up and down the UK, although the penetration is not known and it was up to the schools whether there would be time to celebrate the day in the way the Institute envisaged.

These documents split the Commonwealth into themes. Some ideas were better than others. A Commonwealth charades game in which players selected a country, city, or animal to depict was distinctive, as was a section on food. While some cuisines have made their way into everyday consumption for Britons, food and drink are still a great way to introduce the Commonwealth to both children and adults alike. Therefore, children should be encouraged to make certain Commonwealth foods where appropriate.

A section on designing Commonwealth costumes does look outdated, with the images implying that other Commonwealth citizens all wear traditional dress, such as a Ghanaian wrapper or Indian sari. Tastes on dress and style, especially in major cities, have become more western. Any modern teaching of Commonwealth customs both in food and fashion must convey this change.

Commonwealth Day also mentioned trade for the first time in a rudimentary way. The book mentioned the top three exports from each Commonwealth nation. We argue that more must be made of the trading opportunities between Commonwealth nations, and there is a strong case for teaching young Britons about the economic possibilities of advancing trading links and ties. The Commonwealth as a network should be paramount in this.

A section on the Commonwealth in the UK is a product of its time. A lot has changed in the past 20 years. The language implies that cultural exchange is still novel:

“There are now exiting new ranges of flavours and tropical fruits in the UK...[while] Jamaican reggae has often dominated the national pop music charts.”⁸

More modern iterations are numerous. Examples in the arts include BBC Radio 1Xtra and the BBC Asian Network, along with the growth of Bollywood and Nollywood films in the UK.

There were also mentions in *Commonwealth Day* of the Youth Exchange and the Teacher Exchange as well as the Linking Trust, showing that by the mid-1980s these were still functioning well. In terms of suggestions for different age groups, the Institute advocated displaying Commonwealth flags, coins, stamps, and labels of Commonwealth foods for ages 5–7; establishing a pen friend and cooking a Commonwealth recipe for ages 8–11; and studying the economic development of Commonwealth nations for ages 12–15.

Our concern overall is that all of this information was directed towards Commonwealth Day. The Commonwealth as a subject was not seen as an ongoing areas of study, something that can sit in the curriculum over a set number of lessons spanning a number of weeks. Similar materials produced by ComSec shared this outlook. Those we uncovered were published between 1988 and 1991.⁹ Again, the level of circulation is unclear, but the 100-page document is considerably dense, all black and white, and invariably out of date by today's standards. Mentions were made of the Linking Trust up until 1990, and advice was offered to teachers on how to forge closer ties with schools in other Commonwealth nations. Exchanges were also covered in some detail.

Of note was a section called Commonwealth Press. It suggested getting pupils to read about news stories from around the Commonwealth and present them to the class. We would advance this notion and recommend that children research Commonwealth newspapers and design online magazines or produce news bulletins for TV and radio, utilising video-editing software. Children could incorporate sports and music plus a host of other features into the reports too. This would give Britons the opportunity to move away from often Anglo- or Euro-centric news.

Economics and trade were overlooked, while there was an overemphasis on ComSec's architecture, in prose that is too political and dry in delivery to be likely to engage pupils in the Commonwealth in a creative way.

Moving away from documents to developments, in 1985 Margaret Thatcher ordered a policy review of all government departments. This included an in-depth review of the Institute.¹⁰ The FCO review identified the Institute's aims and objectives and the outreach of its activities, and considered its relevance in society. It also analysed the Institute's efficiency and productivity, and the quality of its outputs. The report said:

“As we see it the primary task of the institute is to impart knowledge and understanding of the Commonwealth and its peoples to British schoolchildren and adults.”¹¹



The report went further to show that, when schools visited the Institute it was noted that classrooms were often overcrowded, but on the whole it was effective in teaching children. However, a major criticism of the Institute was the quality and standard of the teachers' packs; this was a prominent issue throughout the period.¹² Another criticism, which needed to be addressed, was the Institute's outreach. In 1985, 90,000 children visited the Institute, predominantly students from the southwest of England, the north, and Northern Ireland.¹³

Despite the Institute's weaknesses, the FCO did recognise that “the work of the Institute is remarkably effective where it does occur”,¹⁴ although the resources were simply not reaching enough people and not being produced frequently enough. This report set in motion a trajectory that, in the 1990s, saw the fall of the Institute.

Of importance more widely, a major change took place in the UK's education system – the introduction of the national curriculum. What this amounted to was the creation of a programme of study for the UK (except Scotland) that was uniform in terms of content and standards. The 1988 Education Reform Act formally established the national curriculum but it took until 1989 to implement it for primary schools. It was not until the mid-1990s that secondary school education began operating under the new Key Stage design. Unfortunately, the Commonwealth was not specifically mentioned in the new curriculum in either History or Geography.¹⁵

1990s

This decade marked a turning point in the teaching of the Commonwealth for one substantial reason – the slow demise of the Institute. It is not in the scope of this report to give a detailed account of this process, but it does loom large in how inadequately the Commonwealth is taught in UK schools in the present day. In 1992 the FCO announced that it would no longer provide statutory funding for the Institute, which made up 90% of its income.

During a Commons debate on the Institute it was noted that the role of the Institute was:

“Crucial to us in terms of educating young people in Britain...[and] the task of promoting knowledge of the Commonwealth in schools.”¹⁶

The Government's response was that the Institute received only small contributions from other Commonwealth nations for its upkeep while “visitor numbers have been declining, the building deteriorating, and exhibitions galleries were becoming outmoded.” It went further to state:

“It would not be responsible for the Government to continue drip-feeding it [the Institute] with grants simply to enable it to tick over and go into slow decline...it must adapt to modern conditions.”¹⁷

As a result the Government ceased full funding from 1996 and in effect reduced expenditure from £1 million in 1996–7 to £600,000 in 1998–9. In 2000 the severance agreement was a further £8 million, half of which went to property maintenance of the Grade II listed building.¹⁸ With the FCO money ceasing so did the Institute's obligation to spread knowledge about the Commonwealth in UK schools. The Institute heavily reduced its output from 1996 and finally closed its doors for good in 2004 after a long legal struggle over the sale of the building.¹⁹

From this point, the Institute's resources were no longer updated and distributed in UK schools. This created a shortfall as well as a problem in terms of who would take up the mantle. It would appear that ComSec did produce some of materials for UK school children. One example was a small pamphlet entitled *Your Global Network*, which provided a good introduction to the Commonwealth as well as a succinct history section dwelling little on the previous imperial theme. Unfortunately, despite the network analogy, to which we subscribe, there was no specific mention of trade being such a component. However, the pamphlet did make reference to the Commonwealth Youth Credit Initiative, which is said to have helped young people run successful businesses.

Surprisingly, at the end of the millennium the Commonwealth was mentioned in the national curriculum as part of an update in KS1 and KS2. Specifically, in the new subject of Citizenship at KS1 it referred to the Commonwealth along with “local, nations, European, [Commonwealth], and global concerns”.²⁰ The Commonwealth was not mentioned in History or Geography, nor could it be found in KS2 Citizenship. In KS3, the Commonwealth was mentioned in History as an example for “world study after 1900”, suggesting pupils learn “the origins and development of the Commonwealth and its impact”.²¹ In KS3 and KS4 Citizenship the Commonwealth was included under the banner of “the role of the Commonwealth” in the former and under “the UK's relations with the Commonwealth” in the latter.²²



So, at a time when the Commonwealth was starting to be placed in the national curriculum at numerous Key Stages, the institutions and sources available decreased in number, were issued less frequently, and were not updated quickly enough.

2000s

As we have shown, Commonwealth materials in UK schools were out of date and not readily available for teachers or pupils. The Department of Education no longer designed books as it had done in the 1960s. The FCO did not produce catalogues as it had done in the 1970s, and neither did the UK Government pay for the Institute to be the prime advocate of this information.

Therefore, opportunities for a greater Commonwealth understanding in the UK looked bleak. Despite being in the curriculum it took until 2004 for an update. In 2004 ComSec designed *A Family of Nations* in two parts, one for teachers and the other for school children. It was split into three units: an introduction of the Commonwealth; diversity and trade across the Commonwealth; and giving young people a voice. Each unit was divided into five or six lessons. Each unit was designed for Citizenship in KS3 but the book does note that these could be offered in KS4.

In the teaching guide, the units themselves provide a good background of information. However, at over ten years old they are showing signs of wear. For example, when trade is mentioned it is under the banner of "globalisation" – a buzzword of this period that is rarely invoked in this manner in 2015. A "Globalisation Game" does teach children about imports and exports, which is a positive start, but these is not built upon in real detail, for example covering the benefits and opportunities of trade in the Commonwealth, nor is there any discussion on barriers to trade such as tariffs.

There is also too large a focus on institutions. For trade the book highlights the recently defunct Commonwealth Business Council, but no references are made to entrepreneurialism, the international jobs market, or even supply chains for small businesses.

The pupils' version was the last meaningful textbook that ComSec produced at this length and the contents would certainly need updating after 11 years. This resource itself is a positive stride from previous teaching tools. It is not just a set of exercises for Commonwealth Day but is rather appropriate for a variety of different subjects, though it specifically targets the Citizenship programme.

However, the textbook is somewhat scattered in structure and the sequences of chapters are at times misjudged. Placing the Commonwealth Games at the beginning of the book detracts from other important facets of the Commonwealth. Meanwhile, the notion of the Commonwealth being a vehicle for international trade is left to pages 109 and 110, near the very end of the book:

“People now talk of countries trading out of poverty with one another. It is one of the best ways in ensuring that do countries not have to rely on overseas aid. It gives the country dignity to be more self-reliant – and play a valued role in the global economy.”²³

What is said is welcome, yet it feels like a minor footnote at the end of the book and is not built upon in any meaningful way. This resource has positive elements, but it is not a complete product and there are problems that would need to be addressed if a variant were to be redesigned.

In this decade the Commonwealth Games came to Manchester in 2002. This would have been a ripe time to impart knowledge of the Commonwealth in schools. The major output was the Commonwealth Curriculum Pack, which was produced both in hard copy and online. These materials cost £200,000 to produce.²⁴ According to a parliamentary report on the Manchester Games, the pack was sent to all primary and secondary schools in the UK (33,000), and there were nearly 250,000 visits to the website between July and September 2002.²⁵

The Institute created the first Commonwealth online platform and education pack for KS3 and KS4.²⁶ It targeted the PE and Citizenship syllabus to get children involved in their Commonwealth. The Institute had support from the Education and International Development departments.²⁷ The pack promoted key themes such as the environment, cooperation, and human rights to ultimately “expand cultural horizons”.²⁸

It came with a modern and glossy design that included an A2 fantasy map and stickers. One part of the resource focused around what it termed “flash cards” of sportsmen and sportswomen as a means to link the Commonwealth and its ideals to sport.²⁹

The second part of the resources revolved around the imaginary host city of Livia, where children were set tasks relating to the Games and tasks relating to human rights, sustainable development, and sport. Children were encouraged to think critically about the costs and benefits of the Games on Livia and the wider impacts the Games would have.



This “Livia conundrum” was the focal point of the resource and there was limited mention of what the modern Commonwealth network could and should be about. Removing the real Commonwealth from the equation reduced the impact and value the Commonwealth could have on young people's lives. There was a dislocation built into the pack itself.

These materials, such as the map and stickers, could have provided an excellent opportunity for a lasting reminder of the Commonwealth Games, yet children were instead given a lasting impression of an imaginary city. This was certainly a missed opportunity. And, moreover, one that appears to have come at significant monetary cost.

Other sections of the pack did mention the joint Commonwealth sacrifice in both world wars, although this was in the context of a school assembly. There was also a mention to a school-linking project by the British Council, but by this time the Commonwealth Linking Trust (which we mentioned earlier) was no longer operational. In addition, there was no mention of trade, business links, or prosperity agendas for the Commonwealth, which is indicative of the majority of Commonwealth materials for young Britons.

We found no record of whether any teachers went on to harness this resource in Citizenship or in any other subjects.³⁰ Questions remain surrounding the extent to which these packs penetrated the syllabus, making their impact difficult to quantify – especially because the education packs were not particularly easy to access given contacting the Institute directly was the only way of receiving the pack.³¹

The primary focus of the pack was the Games. The pack aimed to:

“Improve skills, educational attainment and personal development within targeted disadvantaged areas, Commonwealth-originating communities and young people, by harnessing the opportunities, interest and fascination created by this major sporting event.”³²

Concerns were raised over the lasting legacy of the Commonwealth education packs, with regards to cost and impact on education. The packs cost £359,061³³ to create and distribute, while the emphasis over a relatively short period of time created a link between the Commonwealth and sport. This may have discouraged children who did not enjoy sport from being interested in learning about the merits of the Commonwealth. If similar resources were to be implemented into the Citizenship programme today, they would need to be accessible for all children. Much like the focus on just Commonwealth Day in the late 1980s and early 1990s, the packs focused on a one-off experience lasting a few weeks. There was no sustained push to teach the Commonwealth in schools once the Games had passed.

To compound events, any progress was stunted following the Institute's demise. This led to a lack of coherent policy surrounding Commonwealth education in British schools, with no singular organisation having this responsibility. Out of the Institute's ashes emerged a new entity – the Commonwealth Education Trust (CET). Unfortunately, it has been conveyed to us by the last Institute director that, given the break in FCO funding, a “conscious choice” was made to switch to an international agenda. This meant that the CET would not produce educational materials about the Commonwealth for young Britons. The CET is still operational to this day but works on providing skills and information to teachers and children in Commonwealth nations.

The year 2002 did see the establishment of a British Empire and Commonwealth museum; however, due to financial mismanagement and under conditions of considerable secrecy, it closed in 2008. It was meant to educate young Britons about the Commonwealth, but as the name heavily implies this was a historical experience that never presented the Commonwealth with a modern vision.³⁴

In sum, in this decade there appears to have been a seven-year gap (2004–11) in teaching and school materials as the responsibility for producing them fell through the cracks.

2010s

A new government brought with it further education reform. The move towards more flexible education by turning increasing numbers of schools into academies and the new Free Schools programme allowed teachers more choice in the curriculum. This presents challenges as well as opportunities for those trying to advance Commonwealth knowledge and understanding in schools. The updated national curriculum for all Key Stages saw the Commonwealth retained in the same format in Citizenship, although its mention in History KS3 was removed.

Two sets of materials stand out in the past five years: the Royal Commonwealth Society's “Antigua to Zambia” teaching resources and the Glasgow 2014 Commonwealth Games education pack – *Commonwealth Class*.³⁵



Antigua to Zambia materials

In March 2011 the Royal Commonwealth Society released an educational resource pack called "Antigua to Zambia" (A–Z). It represents the most complete resource available to date. Funded by the Department for International Development (DfID) and the Commonwealth Foundation, the Royal Commonwealth Society was tasked with producing a pack on the Commonwealth for Citizenship across KS3 and KS4.

We have seen the report on the project given to the DfID. It shows that A–Z was part of a three-year funding application for "Commonwealth youth summits" across the UK. The total project funding was £419,883, with £292,828 coming from the DfID and £127,055 from other sources. It is not clear how much was designated for the A–Z materials, though it was stated that:

“These have been created using the DfID funding for the Summits...and have been distributed to all schools that participated in the programme.”³⁶

Total circulation numbers were not provided in the report.

A–Z as a booklet was broken down into colours: the Green Section for 11–14-year-olds, the Blue Section for 14–18-year-olds, the Purple Section for assembly plans, and the Red Section for "youth summits". This made the process of teaching the Commonwealth in the classroom easier for teachers. The resources were all free online, while the DVD and resource pack were made available to schools.

For example, the Green Section provided instructional information on the Commonwealth for children, raising questions about diversity, development, and democracy around the Commonwealth. Five letters were written by children from around the Commonwealth to provide snapshots of their homes. However, there is a danger of UK children gaining a singular perception or image of these diverse countries due to the still snapshots captured in the letters. For instance, in Kenya, growing up in Nairobi would be very different from growing up in the remote village of Talek. Furthermore, the letters did not reflect the economic developmental changes occurring in the countries of the writers, nor the contrasting experiences of the people. By harnessing technological advancements, we could and should establish a closer and real-time understanding to increase children's awareness of the Commonwealth.

Given its 2011 release, the resource is starting to show its age. Many of the facts, figures, and tasks are now outdated, while many Commonwealth countries have progressed significantly, warranting different depictions in a new textbook. This could be a criticism of the Blue Section, where tasks relate to the Millennium Development Goals, which expired in 2015 and are no longer relevant, with new agendas on the horizon.

Importantly, we welcomed seeing the relationship between trade and the Commonwealth in the Blue Section. It was the first meaningful step in this direction and its writers must be congratulated. However, its focus was too impenetrable in our view. It included debating the merits of a Commonwealth development bank, a micro-finance package, fair trade, and a Commonwealth trade bloc. It was not rooted in the everyday aspects of business. It did not present the Commonwealth as a network between the nations that could provide space for enhancing trade and a horizon for young Britons to look towards. Too much time was given over to a meta-narrative about trade and not enough to the building blocks. Any future syllabus would have to include more basic dimensions in order to move the Commonwealth away from the political.

The Red Section provided resources for the organisation of a youth summit. It provided examples of difficult situations for pupils to debate and find solutions. The two examples were health related – a Malaria epidemic in Kenya and a flu pandemic crossing international borders.³⁷ This should be opened up to include different areas that are topical – for example, the Ebola outbreak or terror attacks in East and Central Africa.³⁸ The summits across the UK were well received by pupils and teachers alike. Crucially, they brought Commonwealth concerns to life in a fun and engaging way. There is a drive to continue them in 2015 in Tower Hamlets schools through the Royal Commonwealth Society.

This represents the fullest resource ever available to students and teachers alike. Usefully, it is still in circulation online. It should be seen as a template from which to build a new Commonwealth curriculum. It requires reform in terms of modernisation and a more in-depth section on trade and prosperity, and to utilise the benefits of technology.



Commonwealth Class

Commonwealth Class was designed in partnership between the Commonwealth Secretariat, the British Council and the BBC. We were informed that each organisation gave £500,000 (£1.5 million total), which created for *Commonwealth Class* interactive learning opportunities for schools based on a website, global assemblies, short topical films produced by the BBC, *English for the Games*, and an educational booklet that provided knowledge for 7–14-year-olds. It followed the similar pattern of flags, nations, the Games, and work on being a global citizen, but uniquely also included online debating sessions across the Commonwealth.

The genesis for *Commonwealth Class* was consideration of the legacy arising from the Queen's Diamond Jubilee in 2012. Her Majesty's 60 years on the throne corresponds with her 60 years as Head of the Commonwealth. For the Secretariat, this milestone presented an opportunity to engage young people from the Commonwealth. The 2014 Glasgow Commonwealth Games were selected as the ideal occasion to present the *Commonwealth Class* activities.

There were concerns that a partnership that included the BBC and the British Council made the Commonwealth appear "too British". However, this could be navigated as the Games were in Glasgow and both organisations are themselves international in character, with a reach that many other Commonwealth nations are hard pressed to match at present.

In fact, *Commonwealth Class* itself was modelled on the BBC's World Class developed for the 2012 Olympics in London. ComSec informed us that the BBC website was valuable as an online platform and offered wider exposure than the Young Commonwealth website, given its reach and reputation as a trusted resource for schools. Additionally, we were told that ComSec welcomed the BBC and the British Council taking the lead in creating the materials, with ComSec itself in a more advisory role, as this strengthened the connection of these organisations with the Commonwealth.

However, for us a significant omission is any reference to trade and prosperity. This is particularly concerning given that the Commonwealth theme for the year 2013 was "Opportunity through Enterprise". There is also little mention of the networked approach of the Commonwealth, which was alluded to in the 1990s.

The British Council intended that it would "reach 100,000 schools worldwide". In its 2013/14 annual report it showed that *Commonwealth Class* had to date "engaged online" 38,000 schools, of which 4,000 had been in the UK.³⁹ In an internal report shared with us, dated December 2014, it was shown to have "reached" 108,923 schools.⁴⁰ We learnt the Council circulated the *Commonwealth Class* materials to most UK schools as a digital copy, while those in the wider Commonwealth received hard copies via the Council's global schools network.

As of April 2015, the BBC web pages remain active but with little of the material and information available.⁴¹ This echoes the rather transient nature of past Commonwealth teaching materials. However, a number of the BBC videos are available on the British Council website.⁴² In accordance with the time-limited nature of its role as host broadcaster partner, the BBC's partnership in *Commonwealth Class* was completed with the conclusion of the Glasgow Commonwealth Games. This adds to the concerns over longevity of the initiative, although we understand that there are discussions on continuing *Commonwealth Class* through to the Malta CHOGM and possibly the Gold Coast Games in 2018. The British Council will announce more in the Autumn of 2015.⁴³

Despite these outstanding issues, teacher case studies were provided to highlight the success of the project, and there were also acknowledgements of a number of new partnerships between UK and other Commonwealth schools. For example:

“It brought a group of schools together and we are now looking to do more work later in the year, based on the *Commonwealth Class* format.”⁴⁴

The *Commonwealth Class* initiative should be read as an encouraging first step for modern materials, but this must be capitalised upon with an expansion into other topics such as trade, and also given more lesson time than just during Commonwealth Games. This was also the first time that school pupils had the chance to learn about the signing of the Commonwealth Charter. Any future materials will need to advertise the Charter and its aims.

Loss of Commonwealth Youth Exchanges

To compound the loss of Commonwealth educational services, the community and school reciprocal youth exchange programme that started in 1970 under the auspices of the Commonwealth Youth Exchange Council (CYEC), was unfortunately downgraded. This meant that CYEC was unable to continue to offer its prime function of promoting Commonwealth youth exchange and provision of associated specialist support services to the schools sector.



As of 2012, the major funder of these exchanges on behalf of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office as part of UK cultural relations, the British Council, took the decision to end its youth mobility grant contributions of around £150,000 per annum. As a result there have been no exchanges since 2013.⁴⁵ On the one hand the British Council withdrew £150,000 for exchanges, but on the other it set aside £500,000 for *Commonwealth Class* with different objectives.

Despite this, the exchange website has highlighted its successes in 2010, showing 33 programmes with many in Commonwealth Africa and a number in the Caribbean and India.⁴² The Commonwealth Youth Exchange website still has its materials online, covering how to run an exchange and looking at topics ranging from travel to visas and health advice. It has even been sponsored by British Airways.⁴³

This places us in a demoralising era where UK school children rarely have opportunities to visit or learn about their fellow Commonwealth counterparts. It is highly unlikely that the funding mechanism will be switched back on or that a government department will fund a revived or revised programme. In comparison, in Europe the Erasmus+ programme has significant funding and offers youth exchanges.

The story is slightly brighter for the teacher exchange programme. It still functions but in a diminished form. Its outreach shrank from Africa and the Caribbean and now it only occurs on a small scale between Australian, Canadian, and UK school teachers.⁴⁴ The programme is now no longer supported by the UK Department for Education; therefore, the teachers themselves now carry the majority of the financial cost for its operation. With this in mind, as long as there is still a demand between these three nations and teachers can afford to pay, the exchanges could continue, although up-scaling to wider parts of the Commonwealth looks unlikely.

With the UK General Election in 2015, a new five-year term provides an opportunity to reassess and plan where and how the Commonwealth can be advanced in schools. This task will be considerable and will require a unified strategy.

Queen's Commonwealth Essay Competition

We intentionally left the story of the Commonwealth Essay Competition to near the end of the story despite its long history. The competition began in 1883 and is the world's oldest and largest schools' international English writing contest. It is open to all Commonwealth citizens up to 18 years of age. It has grown from attracting 36 entries in its first year to now receiving some 12,000 annual submissions from right across the Commonwealth. It is seen as a highly regarded and popular international education project and one of the positive legacies the Commonwealth has to offer young people. In fact, this year's theme is the "Young Commonwealth", acknowledging that the majority of the Commonwealth's population is under 30.⁴⁶

The Government's view

In recent years the UK Government has been somewhat ambivalent regarding Commonwealth education. There was a Foreign Affairs Select Committee report on the Commonwealth in 2012 – the first since 1996. Education was mentioned but there was a significant focus on successful university scholarships as opposed to primary and secondary schooling. The Government's response to young-age education was as follows:

“We agree...that the Commonwealth deserves serious consideration in school curricula...There are already resources available online for each of the key stages, produced by the [Royal Commonwealth Society]...[The Education Secretary] highlighted that, his Department is making £15 million available over the next three years to ensure that all pupils can engage in a variety of cultural activities. We will liaise with the Arts Council England and the Department for Education to explore how Commonwealth education can be promoted in schools.”⁴⁷

To our knowledge nothing has come of this in a Commonwealth context, and as expressed above the A–Z materials are now looking out of date. This vacillation can be witnessed in a Parliamentary Answer from an Education Minister in 2014 that states:

“Primary schools are free to decide whether pupils should be taught about the Commonwealth.”⁴⁸

We welcome the wider teacher freedoms that academies and free schools bring, but the reply is hardly a ringing endorsement of the Commonwealth from the Government, whose predecessors used to fund the Institute, whose statutory role was to educate young Britons about the Commonwealth.

This view is reaffirmed in a more recent departmental answer, which offers little reference to the Commonwealth and closes by saying:

“Teachers and schools are free to use their professional judgment to provide what is best in their circumstances and may draw upon agencies and other expertise as they deem appropriate.”⁴⁹



Conclusion

Our history section is paramount to understanding how the Commonwealth has been taught in UK schools. It outlines a journey that has certainly seen a number of casualties and indeed fatalities, with Commonwealth schemes and organisations closing – particularly the Institute and the Youth Exchange programme. Of equal concern are the mixed messages since the year 2000 on whose responsibility it is to teach about the Commonwealth in the UK. What was once the remit of the Department for Education, the FCO, and the Institute now appears to have fallen to ComSec and the Royal Commonwealth Society with the British Government not taking up the challenge.

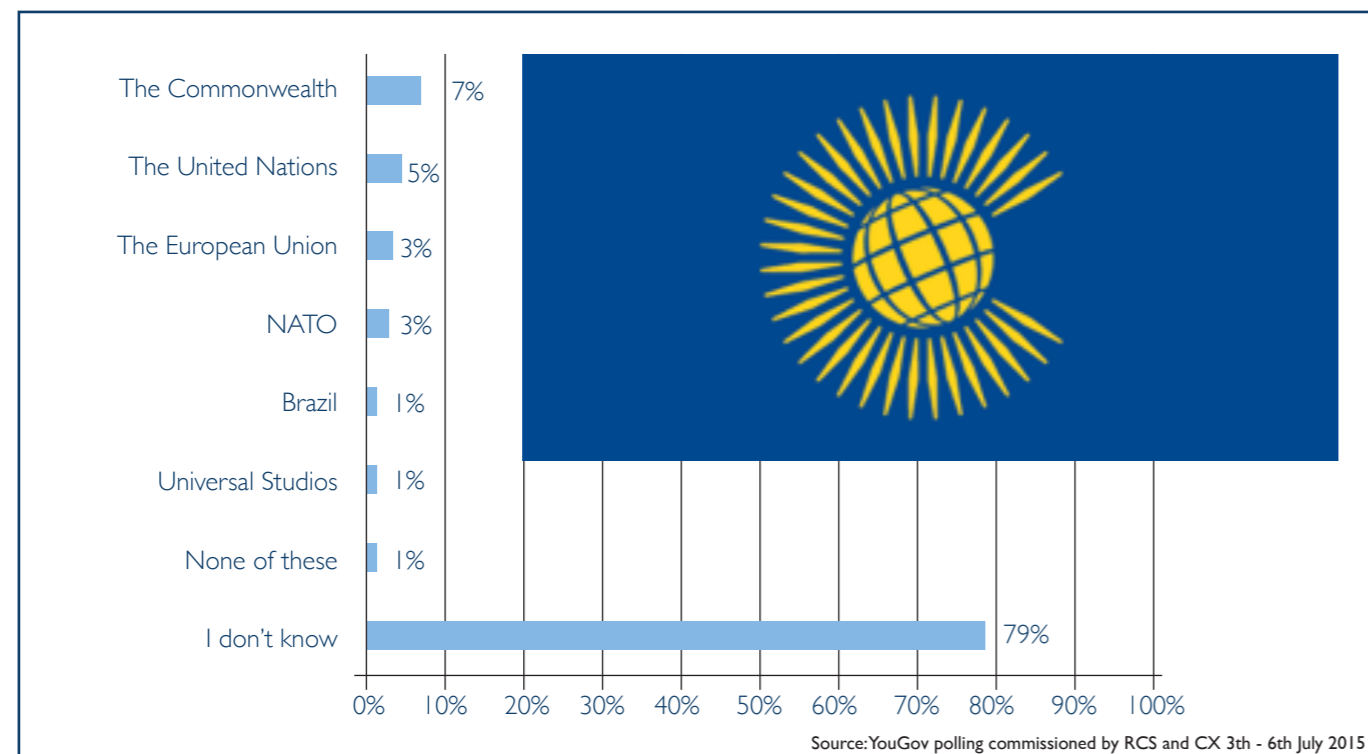
There is a distinct lack of materials that are fit for post-2015 and that have the breadth and depth to be carried over a school term. Materials that have a trade and prosperity section are non-existent. There now appears to be no design either on how to percolate the resources through schools and teachers or, crucially, by what means this should be achieved – Citizenship, but potentially also History or Geography. All this has led to a poor understanding and appreciation of the Commonwealth beyond Commonwealth Day or whenever the UK secures the Games. Critically, its feature in the national curriculum is nothing more than a token. More must be done, and it must be done in the context of a scarcity of funds; however, it is certainly achievable. Young Britons' interaction with and appreciation of the wider world is at stake.



/Polling of UK School Children/

Commonwealth Exchange and the Royal Commonwealth Society commissioned polling to be undertaken by YouGov to ascertain young Britons' understanding of the Commonwealth. Doing so provided a current snapshot of how young Britons see the Commonwealth and this allowed us to feed the responses into this report's recommendations. The polling was conducted between 3 and 6 July 2015 and the questions were posed to 581 children aged between 8 and 15. We wanted a spread of children from primary and secondary school ages as our policy recommendations cover these year groups. The questions were closed, with a list of possible answers provided. We acknowledge that the results may have been somewhat skewed given the 2014 Commonwealth Games in Glasgow and the Queen's Diamond Jubilee in 2012, which may have raised awareness of the Commonwealth to a higher level than in previous years. What follows are the results and our analysis.

Q1: Do you know what this is the flag for?



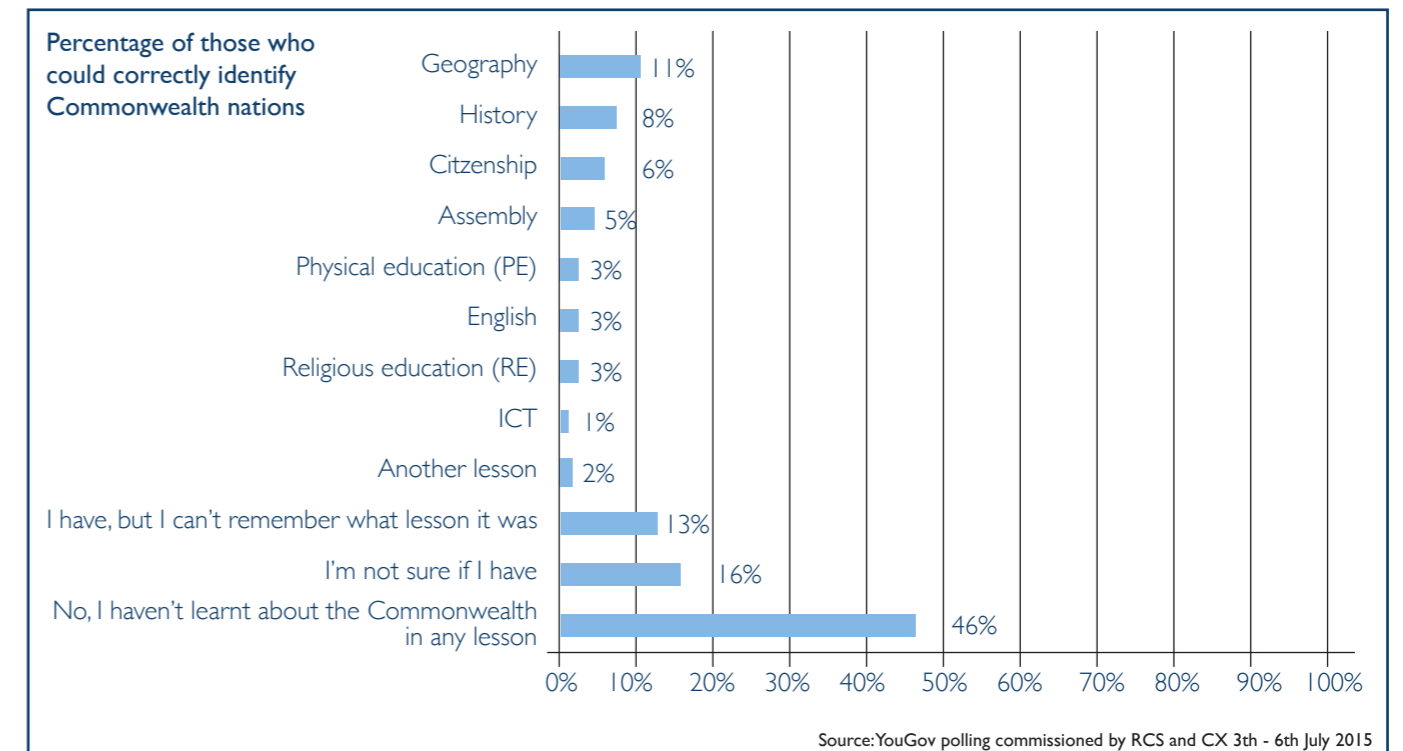
As the bar graph above shows, only 7% of children could identify that this was the flag of the Commonwealth, with 5% thinking it was the UN flag. Interestingly, nearly 80% could not identify it at all. Although the Commonwealth is more than a flag, having an iconic and recognisable image is part of strong brand awareness. It is clear the Commonwealth has not been able to create an image that young Britons can identify.

This is despite the hard work of the Fly a Flag for the Commonwealth campaign (<http://www.flyaflagforthecommonwealth.co.uk>), which started in 2014 and has focused on encouraging local councils to fly the flag during Commonwealth Day. This is starting to move into schools with a number flying the flag in 2015 and more planning to do so in 2016.⁵⁰

The 7% does show that even a basic element of Commonwealth understanding is significantly low for young Britons. Ability to identify the flag changed little with age. The age groups ranged between 3% and 8% with a spike of 14% at age 14. There is also no apparent difference between boys (7%) or girls (6%). Therefore any introductory lessons through new school materials must include a visible showing of the flag to ensure more positive identification rates.



Q2: Have you learnt about the Commonwealth in any of these lessons at school?



Nearly 50% of school children polled said that they had not learnt about the Commonwealth in school. This is a concerning statistic as it follows numerous efforts during the Manchester and Glasgow Games as well as the Royal Commonwealth Society's A-Z document, which were expected to reach thousands of schools. There was also a noticeable split between year groups. Primary school pupils (ages 8–11) were most lacking in Commonwealth teaching, at rates ranging from 65% to 43%. In secondary schools the rate zig-zagged from 48% among those aged 13 down to 27% among those aged 14 and back up to 39% among those aged 15.

This is compounded by only 6% of total respondents claiming to have learnt about the Commonwealth in Citizenship lessons despite it being included in KS3. In KS3 years the figure did double to 12%, but this amounts to just over one in ten children learning about the Commonwealth in Citizenship.

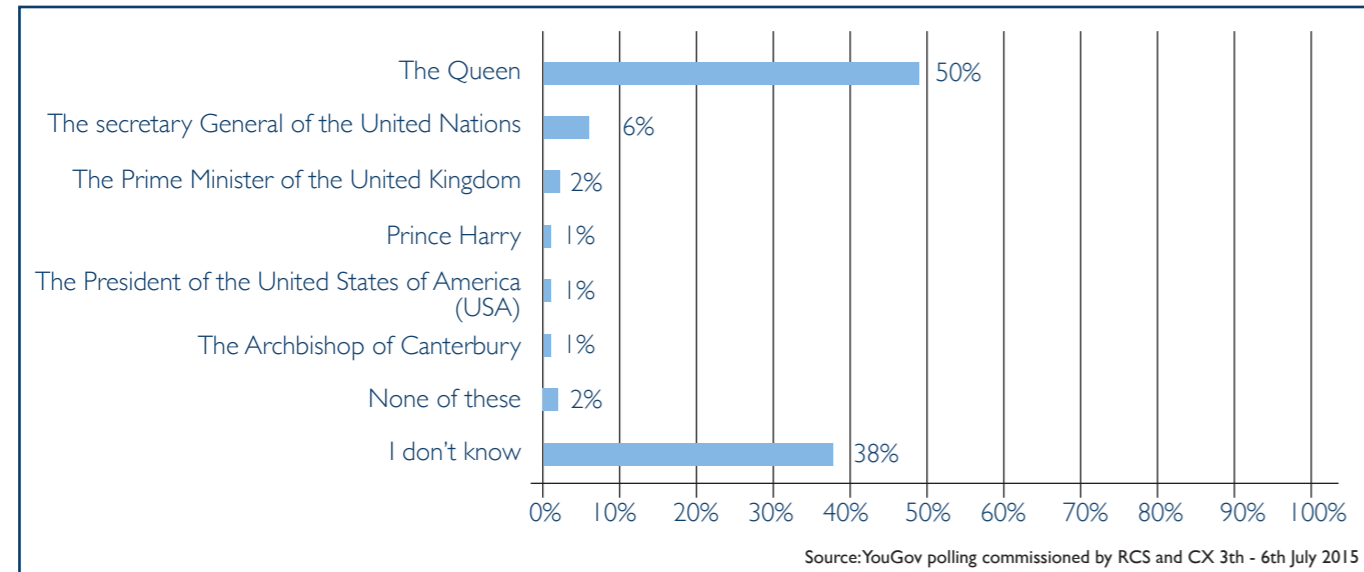
Geography tops the lesson table with 11%. This is interesting, as most modern materials have not focused on Geography as a main source of teaching, as analysis has already shown. Many decades ago emphasis was placed upon this subject as well as History. In fact History ranked second (8%). This may be down to numerous factors such as the centenary of World War I in 2014–18, with the Government providing extra focus on the wider Commonwealth sacrifice of those from the Indian sub-continent and Africa.

As we have shown in our history section, there has been a push to learn about the Commonwealth through sport as well as in assemblies. Unfortunately, this was not borne out in the polling. Only 3% learnt about the Commonwealth during PE and 5% in assemblies. It would imply that such efforts have not been as successful as planned or that the methods used did not work.

Q3: Who do you think is Head of the Commonwealth?

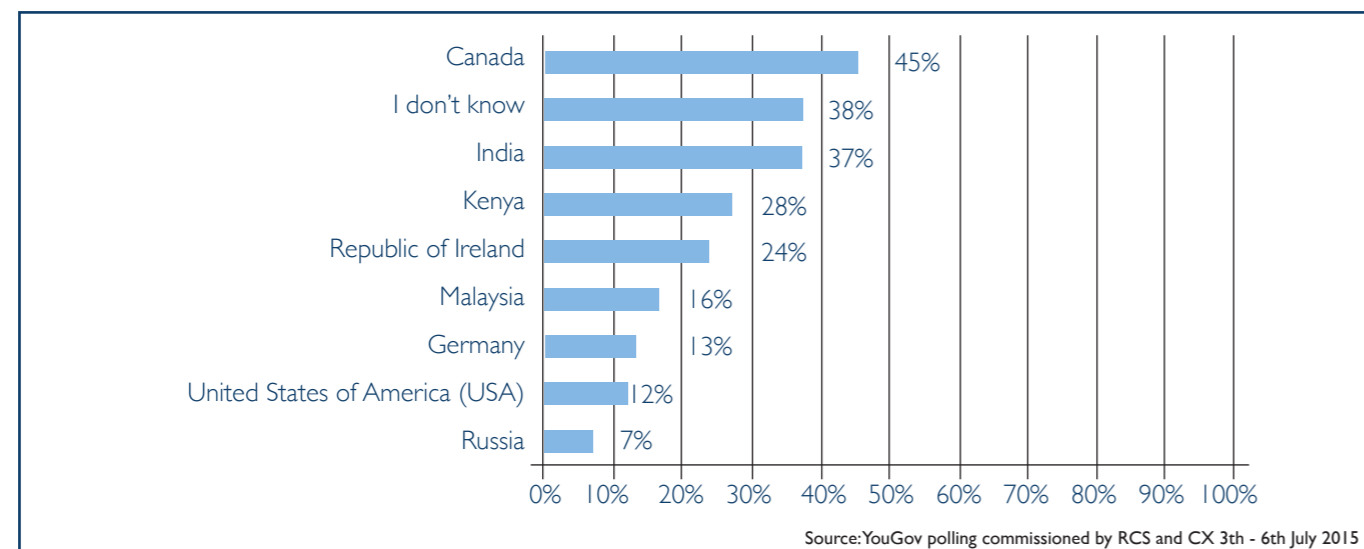
One first glance it would appear that young Britons are rather knowledgeable about Her Majesty the Queen being Head of the Commonwealth. This is in contrast to children's knowledge about the flag. Half of those polled could correctly name the Queen. However, nearly 40% were not able to guess who is Head of the Commonwealth.

This finding can be interpreted positively or negatively. The Glasgow Games last year provided the Queen with the opportunity to perform her duties as Head of the Commonwealth and Queen of 15 Commonwealth Realms (the UK included). Her annual Christmas messages often mention the Commonwealth too.



Yet, despite the initial 50% figure from this poll, we looked at past polling commissioned by the Royal Commonwealth Society in 2010 that asked the same question but to 18–25-year-olds and 35+-year-olds. Among the younger age group, 57% correctly selected the Queen, while a significant 75% did so in the older age group.⁵¹ This may indicate that knowledge of the Commonwealth is diminishing over the generations, which would be of considerable concern. If young people miss out on the chance to learn about the Commonwealth in schools, they might take this lack of knowledge into their adult lives and professions, further undermining the potential of the Commonwealth. Again, if 50% of young Britons do not have the basics, they cannot be expected to grasp additional details. Through reformed and updated school materials we want the figures to be at the 35+ levels.

Q4: Which of these countries do you think are part of the Commonwealth?

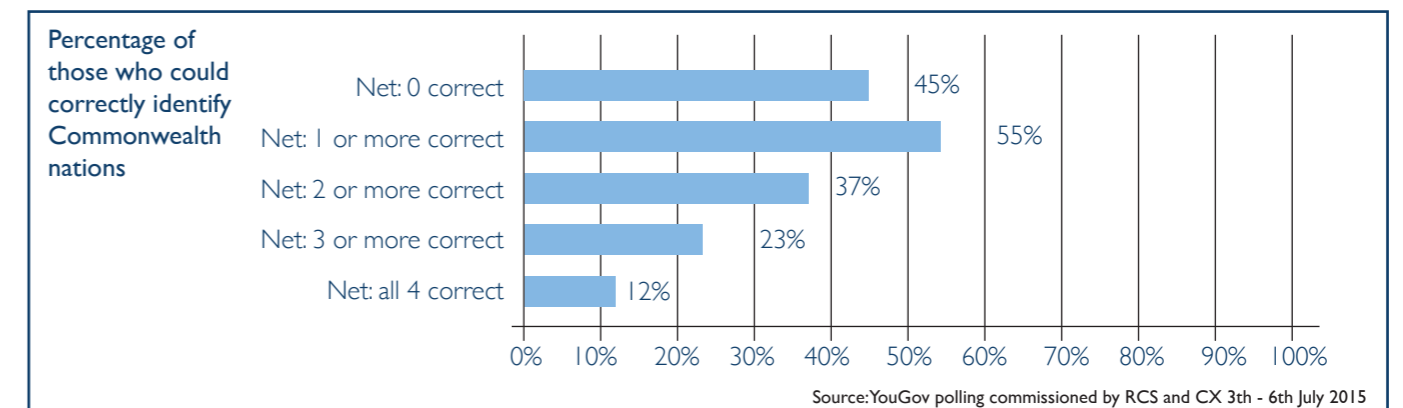


The aim of this question was to test young Britons' basic knowledge of Commonwealth nations. We hoped that they would be able to select at least three correct nations. The graph shows that 45% of the children surveyed could correctly identify Canada. Of particular interest is that almost one quarter of children thought that Ireland was part of the Commonwealth. Despite the violent upheavals between the UK and Ireland in the past, with the latter declining to join the Commonwealth, many of the young Britons surveyed thought Ireland is a Commonwealth member. That being said, there have been recent efforts to court Ireland's addition to the Commonwealth,⁵² such as the Royal Commonwealth Society opening a branch in Dublin to help build relations.⁵³

Other, more concerning findings saw more children say they did not know which nations were in the Commonwealth than those who could identify India as a member (38% versus 37%). Moreover, only around one sixth (16%) could correctly identify Malaysia, while 13% and 12% respectively thought Germany and the USA were members. In terms of age, any varying results were small. Correct answers only increased slightly with age but this trend was not always uniform.

Of note were variations across gender: Boys selected correct answers with a 3% to 5% higher success rate: Canada 48% versus 43%, Malaysia 18% versus 15%, India 39% versus 35%, and Kenya 30% versus 25%. However, boys slightly overestimated their wrong answers too: Ireland 26% versus 21%, Germany 13% versus 12%, and USA 12% versus 10%. The data do not offer a rationale as to why girls appear to know less about Commonwealth geography, but this should be addressed in future educational materials to ensure equal understanding.

As for correctly guessing Commonwealth nations, the data provide cause for concern.



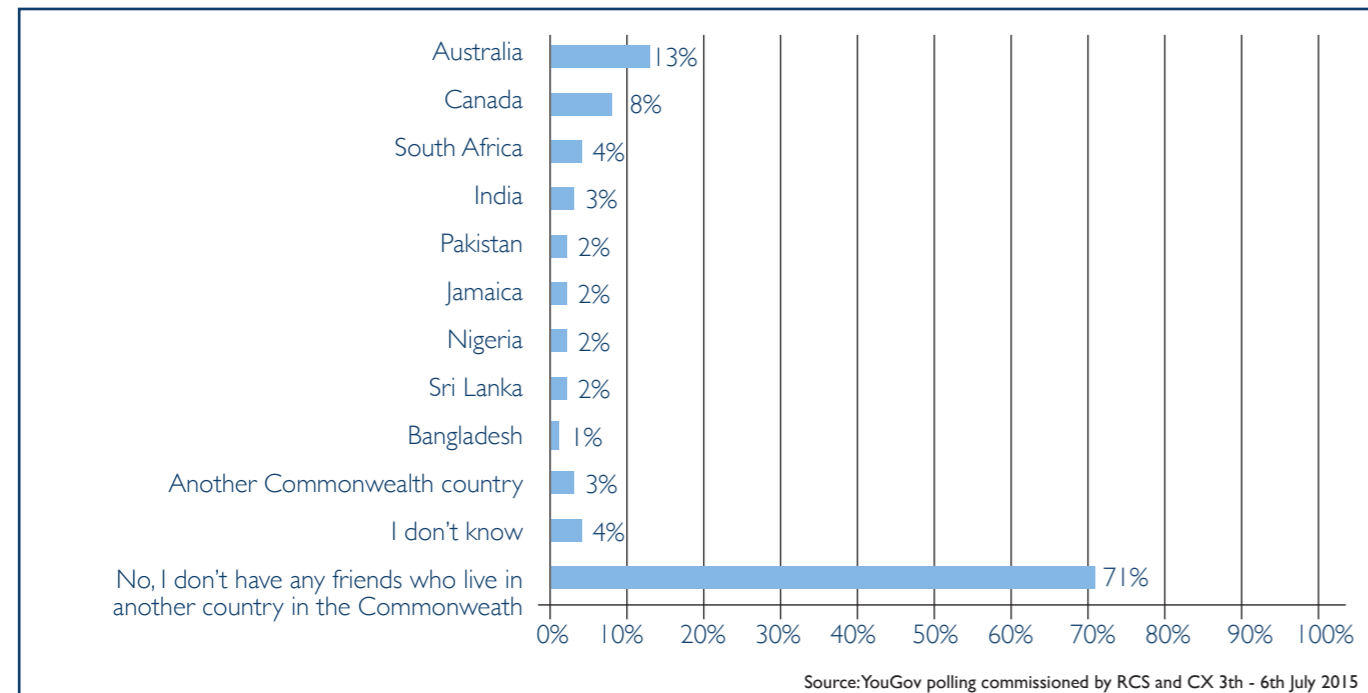
While over half could guess one Commonwealth nation (the majority of which selected Canada and around a third India), 45% did not get one country right. In our view the most basic of Commonwealth knowledge should be that young Britons can correctly identify three members – but unfortunately under a quarter could do so (23%). From this we can say that much work is needed not just in the Geography curriculum but also in wider Citizenship lessons. As expressed, Commonwealth understanding should not just be the ability to remember flags and places, but the argument still stands that if young Britons are unable to identify Commonwealth nations they will struggle to grasp the broader and more nuanced concepts and opportunities surrounding the Commonwealth and its people. Recommendations such as the Commonwealth Newsroom and the Commonwealth Chat scheme along with more interactive and digital educational resources aim to help in this regard.

Q5: Do you have any friends who you know live in any of these Commonwealth countries?

We posed this question to young Britons because we wanted to ascertain whether they had a Commonwealth connection outside the UK who was not a family member. One of our major recommendations calls for the reintroduction of a Commonwealth pen pal scheme based on cheap, quick, and modern communications methods such as email. If the previous scheme had evolved and continued, a larger proportion of young Britons would have had the opportunity to have a friend in a Commonwealth nation. As can be seen, 71% of British school children do not have a Commonwealth friend. This is a major concern for an institution that prides itself on being decentralised and a network, especially when 60% of that network is under the age of 30.

We had also assumed (wrongly) that, given the UK's prominent diaspora populations, those whose numbers are highest such as India and Pakistan would register more significantly. The polling did not bear this out. Among those polled, 13% had an Australian friend, followed by 8% with a Canadian friend and 4% with a South African friend. These nations represent the main part of the Old Commonwealth countries. This may imply that the UK's Commonwealth ties endure more with these countries than the new Commonwealth nations. This may indeed change, as the UK becomes a more diverse population.

In terms of gender there was no discernible difference (73% male to 70% female) in not having a Commonwealth friend. The same can also be said of age groups, although there was a 22% spike of nine-year-olds with friends in Australia.



However, geographic variations in Britain were noticeable. India was joint highest at 10% in London compared to a national share of 3%, while Pakistani links saw a 7% figure (2% nationally) and Nigeria registered with 6% (2% nationally). This could certainly be attributed to London's diverse nature.

In any event, the fact that only three in ten young Britons has a Commonwealth friend provides a strong platform to argue that a new pen pal scheme – Commonwealth Chat – could be the basis for increasing this number. This would help to provide children with a real-time understanding of various Commonwealth nations from the perspective of those their own age – an experience that a textbook would struggle to deliver. We hope that if this polling question were carried out in five years' time, with Commonwealth Chat in place across hundreds of UK schools, the number of children with a Commonwealth friend would be significantly higher.

Conclusion

In summary, this polling provides a window into young Britons' current Commonwealth comprehension. The results are mixed to poor, with half identifying the Queen as Head of the Commonwealth but only 7% correctly recognising the Commonwealth flag. Under a quarter of children (23%) could accurately pick three Commonwealth nations, while seven out of ten pupils do not have a friend in any Commonwealth country. In terms of class time, just under half claimed that they had not learnt about the Commonwealth in school time, with only a small percentages having had it mentioned in lessons – Geography (11%), History (8%), Citizenship (6%), and assembly (5%) – despite it being in the national curriculum at KS3.

In order to boost these numbers, a set of rigorous, achievable, and well-constructed policy recommendations needs to be advocated. This is promoted in the next section of the report. Given the pressure on teachers' timetables coupled with a critical lack of up-to-date Commonwealth resources that are sustainable rather than one-off, securing future positive data will be difficult to achieve in five or ten years' time unless there is new policy in place that is supported by both government and official Commonwealth organisations. Ambivalence and too narrow a focus will continue to undermine the pursuit of creating more informed young Commonwealth citizens who are aware of this vast and diverse network that can provide them with great opportunities.



/Recommendations/

I Update Commonwealth curriculum resources

Finding a home for the Commonwealth

We acknowledge the increased strain on teaching time, with numerous subjects vying for the same space. The Commonwealth as a topic has been demoted and often ignored through a combination of little lesson time and a lack of modern, technologically infused resources. We are certainly not arguing that the Commonwealth have its own dedicated subject. Instead it makes practical sense to include aspects of the Commonwealth in current subjects. The mid-to-late 20th century shows us that the Commonwealth was part of History and Geography lessons but more recent times saw a move towards Citizenship classes. Our polling shows that these three subjects remain important to Commonwealth studies, despite their low impact on comprehension of the Commonwealth. But ICT lessons should also include material on the Commonwealth, given the scope to connect with the Commonwealth and its peoples through technology – especially via our ideas on Commonwealth Chat and a newsroom feature.

This section will set out to provide a path that future Commonwealth lessons could take. We are honest about how much class time the Commonwealth can be given. With this in mind any new materials will have to be clearly broken down into possible lesson ideas for specific subjects. Cost is also an issue for the production of resources, and that is why we propose a move to digital materials that are accessible on smart boards and tablets in schools.

Simply put, we must find an up-to-date home for the Commonwealth in UK schools, one where it will be welcomed.

Why should the Commonwealth be in the curriculum?

Global citizenship and soft power

As a collection of 53 economically developed, emerging, and developing nations and 2.3 billion people across all habitable continents, the Commonwealth provides young Britons with an unparalleled opportunity to understand and view the world. It also houses all major faiths, cultures, music, and sports and is united by a common tongue through the English language. Involvement in the Commonwealth thus promotes a sense of global citizenship. It also teaches young people about Britain's soft power in the world and how this can be collectively utilised for mutual benefit by the Commonwealth.

In Britain the unique network that connects the people of the Commonwealth is not widely prioritised. The ties of the Commonwealth diaspora continue to shape the UK today and could be used to improve trade connections, to close international socio-cultural gaps, and to promote collective solutions to global challenges.

Bringing the Commonwealth to life in our classrooms will have a positive impact at home and abroad. Internationally, it will encourage a global outlook, forging new connections between future generations. This would ultimately broaden the horizons of our children, teaching skills they could take into all walks of life, such as politics, law, charitable work, media, engineering, finance, banking, and medicine. An appreciation of, and active participation in, the Commonwealth is positive for young Britons. It encourages an understanding of our history and heritage, but also our present and future.

Dispelling the myth

Unfortunately, the Commonwealth and its institutions are currently perceived by many as ageing political entities with little relevance in modern society.⁵⁴ The lack of resources available for teaching the Commonwealth is exacerbating this idea for children. Other institutions and groups, such as the EU and the UN, often take precedence over the Commonwealth, hindering its ability to rise up the agendas of politicians, economists, and British schools.

Numerous UK governments have done little to combat the ingrained misconceptions about the Commonwealth. Expanding the teaching focus would ensure that children's understanding of the Commonwealth adds up to more than simply knowing about the Commonwealth Games or seeing it as an "outdated institution".

Ultimately, broadening the horizons of children is constructive for their education and development, and would be constructive for the Commonwealth too. It could contribute to the development of critical and analytical thinking. Too often, developing nations are portrayed as economically, socially, and culturally backwards. This was a drawback of previous Commonwealth resources and exercises in schools, in which the "them and us" attitude often stigmatised cultures and societies. However, a lot has changed in the past 20, ten, and even five years, and many Commonwealth countries are rapidly changing. Cities that were previously portrayed as



developing have now advanced to a more modern status, and have become economic hubs shaping the lives of their inhabitants.

Connecting young people

We are now closer connected than ever; yet our modern understanding of the Commonwealth could not be further adrift. The Commonwealth's diversity provides an unrivalled avenue for young Britons to explore the world. An updated curriculum that captures the potential of the Commonwealth through technology could broaden the horizons of young Britons. For example, the internet provides international news at our fingertips; yet, too often, negative news and alarmist media cloud our judgement of many Commonwealth nations. This is evident for instance in Kenya, where recent terrorist atrocities have raised fears about terrorist violence, disproportionately so given other attacks in so-called safer places such as Paris.

Furthermore, the Commonwealth is often portrayed in an archaic manner; but people under the age of 30 make up 60% of its population, so it is an ideal subject to be teaching young Britons. Linking Commonwealth schools together promotes greater understanding while Commonwealth Chat would provide young people across the Commonwealth with a means and prized opportunity to have a friend in another Commonwealth country. Schools must be the place to start in forging the future of the Commonwealth in order to enhance the brand among young people.

How could the Commonwealth be taught?

At different times the Institute and the Royal Commonwealth Society have demonstrated effective ways to teach children about the Commonwealth. However, there is not a one-size-fits-all solution for giving the Commonwealth deserved recognition in the classroom. This is especially the case as education policy is a devolved issue across the UK. Any new materials will have to be sensitive to variations in teaching priorities; therefore, it makes sense to make them broadly applicable to all parts of the UK and, if successful, adapt them for other Commonwealth nations to utilise.

As highlighted previously, the main focus of the Commonwealth appears to centre around the Games and the Day. This one-off annual or quadrennial exposure to the Commonwealth lacks depth and breadth. As a result young Britons are taught little about the modern and multi-faceted Commonwealth network that shapes Britain daily. Expanding the breadth of teaching focus would ensure that children's understanding of the Commonwealth adds up to more than simply knowing about the Games, and being able to understand it as more than a political entity. Exposure in specific lessons would help.

Example of a school week

	1	2	3	4	5
Monday	History	Maths	Modern Foreign Language	Science	Citizenship
Tuesday	English	Art	Science	Maths	Physical Education
Wednesday	Form Period	Science	ICT	English	Music/Drama
Thursday	Science	English	Geography	Maths	Design
Friday	English	Games	Maths	French	Religious Education

By means of an example, above is the weekly timetable of a Year 9 pupil at a school in Northamptonshire. In Years 7-8, the timetable is similar, with slight variations. Lessons are 50 minutes long. Through the subjects highlighted the timetable provides opportunities for the Commonwealth to be taught and celebrated in schools.

Citizenship, PSHE, and ICT

Citizenship – Incorporating the Commonwealth into Citizenship is not a revolutionary idea; the Commonwealth already has a small place on the syllabus of these subjects:

“Local, regional and international governance and the United Kingdom’s relations with the rest of Europe, the Commonwealth, the United Nations and the wider world.”⁵⁵

Citizenship has the advantage of being a compulsory lesson in KS3, so it provides the ideal space for children between the ages of 11 and 14 to approach the subject of the Commonwealth. Importantly, Citizenship tackles contemporary challenges such as democracy, law, human rights, and development – themes and challenges that are prevalent within the Commonwealth. Citizenship



asks important social, political, economic, and legal questions both nationally and internationally, aiming to “equip children with the skills, knowledge and understanding to make a difference and be active and engaged citizens”.⁵⁶ The Commonwealth fits smoothly into the aims and objectives of the syllabus.

We accept that the Commonwealth cannot come to dominate the Citizenship curriculum, but it certainly does justify a solid foundation. A school that on average has 12 weeks in a term and three terms a year could allow three weeks plus homework time to be given over to the Commonwealth in Citizenship lessons; this appears an appropriate amount given the pressure and competition of other priorities in the subject. It would be impossible to cover all the diverse aspects of the Commonwealth in one introductory lesson, but, given that Citizenship in KS3 spans three years, different year groups could focus on different topics – for example, the environment in Year 7, democracy in Year 8, and trade and prosperity in Year 9 – thereby providing exposure to the Commonwealth each year.

We provide an example below of a Commonwealth Newsroom project, which could link effectively with ICT lessons through the use of media tools – for example, audio and visual editing software such as Final Cut Pro or graphic design packages such as InDesign or QuarkXPress. This would present the Commonwealth in a technologically modern and global perspective in contrast to previous approaches of learning facts, flags, or figures by rote.

Commonwealth Newsroom – We rarely hear good news emanating from Commonwealth countries, and it is often bad news that sells newspapers. However, as international news is so readily available over the internet, a project to research and analyse the current affairs of Commonwealth countries could offer a helpful insight into those countries' cultures, societies, and ways of life. Many sports stars and idols come from Commonwealth countries – Usain Bolt from Jamaica, Hugh Jackman from Australia, and Justin Bieber from Canada, to name just three. There is something or someone for every child to pinpoint and research within Commonwealth countries.

In Citizenship pupils are required to learn about newspapers and media bias. Therefore children could look at English language Commonwealth sources to provide different perspectives on contemporary challenges in the world. Much of this news does not normally reach the mainstream British media. It would be interesting for children to compare and contrast different countries' current affairs, local stories, values, interests, and even gossip, spanning a range of areas such as music, sport, art, celebrity, fashion, crime, and food. The session could culminate with a radio, TV, or newspaper presentation on the chosen nation. This would not only educate and entertain but also establish real intrigue about Commonwealth cultures and societies.

PSHE: Primary school – In primary school education, Citizenship is not compulsory in the curriculum, but children between the ages of five and 11 take PSHE (personal, social, and health education), often under a different alias, on a fortnightly basis, and on a rotating schedule.

There is an opportunity for the Commonwealth to contribute to child development at a young age. In early years education, PSHE promotes the “spiritual, moral, cultural, mental and physical development of pupils at the school and of society, and prepare[s] pupils at the school for the opportunities, responsibilities and experiences of later life”.⁵⁷ This is a prime opportunity to introduce the Commonwealth in an appropriate way for this age group.

Methods could include using our Commonwealth app to look at flags, maps, coins, stamps, and wider parts of culture. Learning should be about seeing other people around the Commonwealth as kin, and seeing the Commonwealth as something that children want to be a part of and identify with, taking this with them into their future lives.

A large part of PSHE in schools relates to building and maintaining relationships. Therefore, the above suggestions could be further enhanced through their combination with ICT and our Commonwealth Chat recommendation. This would show the Commonwealth as a global network of nations but also to provide the opportunity to have a new friend in a Commonwealth country for the first time. As our polling shows, seven out of ten young Britons do not have this Commonwealth connection. Over the course of a 12-week term, children could foster new relationships and bonds with children from around the Commonwealth, without teachers needing to designate the whole lesson to the task.

ICT – As explained previously, for primary schools we advocate the reintroduction of the Commonwealth pen pal scheme. This could span both PSHE and ICT lessons, and children could have 20 minutes each week or fortnightly across Year 5 to update their counterpart in another Commonwealth school. This could be combined with teaching children internet safety and awareness. For secondary schools we propose a link between Citizenship lessons that looks at international media through our Commonwealth Newsroom idea and the use of media software that would give young Britons the chance to gain a better understanding of world



affairs, through alternatives to the standard European or American media. This would take up to around two lessons plus homework time in both subjects and children would deliver a presentable media piece on a particular Commonwealth nation.

Suggested area of study for Citizenship

Lesson 1	Introduction to the Commonwealth – focus on democracy, rule of law, trade, health, and the environment
Lesson 2	Commonwealth Newsroom project
Lesson 3	Presenting Commonwealth Newsroom

History

The Commonwealth deserves a place in schools' History timetable, but this does come with caveats. We do not want to see the Commonwealth taught as something of and from the past. If it is portrayed only in this way then the teaching will reinforce the relic label to yet another generation of young Britons. Properly managed space should be given over to the Commonwealth's contributions in the world wars as well as the decolonisation period.

For example, with the centenary of World War I, the Coalition Government and Baroness Warsi in particular contributed to greater recognition of Commonwealth sacrifice and to highlighting the Commonwealth diaspora in the UK.⁵⁸ Moreover, the Commonwealth War Graves Commission has a role in UK schools. It is "dedicated to providing high quality learning resources that are fit for all ages" and provides "lesson activities, case studies, micro-sites, detailed histories and a newsletter".⁵⁹ A lot can be learnt from its innovative solutions to bringing the Commonwealth to the classroom. Its app and interactive sessions could be more effectively incorporated into History lessons.

However, more still needs to be done to promote the Commonwealth away from the world wars. The footprints of the people of the Commonwealth are still leaving their mark. There are large sections of Commonwealth history that are significantly under-represented. The people of the Commonwealth have often fought and struggled for freedom, democracy, and human rights. There are many inspiring lessons to learn and stories to remember, and the actions of the past continue to influence modern society.

In terms of practical lesson planning we suggest that three lessons would be appropriate for young Britons to learn about the Commonwealth in History across a school year. New materials should work to these parameters.

Suggested area of study for History

Lesson 1	The Commonwealth in World War
Lesson 2	The Commonwealth in World War II
Lesson 3	The Commonwealth: A modern history

Geography

As a subject, Geography came out top in our polling, with one in ten young Britons saying they had learnt about the Commonwealth in this lesson. Therefore, the Commonwealth should continue to have a place in teaching on this subject. Spanning every habitable continent and with a population of nearly 2.3 billion people, the Commonwealth has ample geographical case studies to be taken into the classroom. Whether children are tackling glaciation, river formations, or coasts in physical geography, or urban versus rural development and tourism in human geography, the Commonwealth has the scope and diversity to play a key role.

Designing a small number of Geography lessons a year on the Commonwealth will also allow children to be taken out of the kind of regional bloc mentality that focuses on regions – for example, Europe or Africa. Such a mentality often stagnates understanding of societies and peoples, and an alternative approach could help to develop a new understanding of global networks and interconnectedness.

The Commonwealth provides the scope and diversity to explore geographical topics and create interesting projects that are relevant in the modern world. Developing countries in Africa, emerging economies in Asia, and the Commonwealth's developed countries are prime examples of the multiplicity of societies and places on offer.

In this subject we do not wish to be too prescriptive as the Commonwealth's international nature opens up the possibility of covering numerous geographical phenomena such as rivers, earthquakes, volcanoes, and urban geography to name but a few. However, there could be specific lesson time given over to learning about the Commonwealth diaspora, the development of the



Commonwealth and current economic and environmental challenges, and the overall physical geography of the Commonwealth.

Another area of study open to pursue in Geography is exploration and discovery across the Commonwealth. Rather than linked to History under old stories of war and conquest it could be associated with scientific, maritime, and mathematical discoveries and how these are practically applied today, thereby widening Commonwealth understanding into the scientific sphere.

Suggested area of study for Geography

Lesson 1	Commonwealth diaspora
Lesson 2	Development in the Commonwealth: Current economic and environmental challenges
Lesson 3	Physical Commonwealth: Breadth and depth of the Commonwealth

What should new Commonwealth resources look like?

New Commonwealth resources have the opportunity to be appropriate for a tech-savvy generation of children, allowing Commonwealth learning to be interactive and engaging. No pupil wants a dense 100-page black-and-white textbook of facts and figures to carry around school all day.

We recommend that updated materials take a different approach. Design efforts should specifically go into creating a streamlined resource that functions primarily for interactive white boards in schools. This will reduce the cost of production significantly by removing the need to print thousands of hard-copy textbooks. There have been PDF copies of recent materials such as the *Commonwealth Class* and A-Z, but none have plugins, embedded hyperlinks, or audio or video clips. Scope should also be provided for a smart phone app or web app. The new Commonwealth resource should be available for use on tablets and integrate a Google Maps platform so young Britons can swipe, click, and tap their way to Commonwealth knowledge. Design should also go into creating space to learn about news around the Commonwealth to enable pupils to enhance their global citizenship credentials. More of which in later recommendations.

In addition, a digital handbook for teachers could be provided for classroom education. From this handbook teachers could print out worksheets or even send standalone editable PDFs to pupils for them to complete homework tasks. Unlike traditional printed textbooks, these materials could be edited and updated when required to ensure that the Commonwealth remains current.

Digitally, the length of the resource matters less than in a printed textbook; instead, clarity and ease of consumption are paramount. We propose a streamlined approach that is broken down into an introductory section dealing with the Commonwealth basics – which our polling has shown UK children lack – to be used in primary schools; subject-specific lesson plan to cover Citizenship, History, Geography, and ICT in secondary schools; and finally an appendix containing all the worksheets so that teachers can issue tasks.

In terms of style, the Commonwealth cannot just be seen as a human rights organisation that orbits around political advocacy. As a global network it is too multi-layered for this label to remain. With this in mind, in terms of syllabus content there must be more variation in topics that are taught. Trade and prosperity is a crucial component of the modern Commonwealth that has been overlooked in previous resources and children should be made more aware of how the Commonwealth can develop regions of the world.

In the past there has been a significant focus on countries' cultural ties and shared identities, but without properly explaining their relevance in trade and international development. However, the ways in which these ties can impact trade around the world and be catalysts for investment between Commonwealth countries is a topic that must be given greater consideration. Doing so will provide young Britons with a better understanding of global prosperity and wealth.

Finally, since the closure of the Institute in the early 2000s, there has been a gap in who delivers Commonwealth educational materials. Even if an organisation or the UK Government steps forward, the distribution chain to schools must be of a high quality. Schools and teachers must be made aware of the materials and how they can be easily incorporated to enhance their weekly lesson plans.

Conclusion

In conclusion, updated Commonwealth educational materials are required in order to provide better understanding of the modern Commonwealth network. Many outdated concepts still exist and young Britons' knowledge of the Commonwealth is rather poor, as our polling indicates. For too many years the Commonwealth has been allowed to drift away from the school environment, only



ever regaining transient relevance when there is a one-off or major Commonwealth event. By reforming how it is taught, schools can reassert the importance of the Commonwealth and allow future generations to rediscover the institution.

This can be done through a focus on four subjects that overlap: Citizenship, History, Geography, and ICT. The resources themselves must tap into technological advancements to engage young people. Gone are the days of weighty textbooks. An interactive e-book that is compatible with smart boards in schools is required, as is an app for use on tablets. There must also be more of a focus on themes related to prosperity. And Commonwealth resources must move away from the purely political. Pressure on lesson time is an important factor that must be taken into consideration when designing the materials, which means a slim-line but multi-discipline approach is essential. The materials must also be practical and easy to distribute to schools.

We urge the UK Government to give the Commonwealth greater recognition in UK schools. With pressure growing on the socio-economic relevance of Europe and mounting economic pressure from emerging powers, it is the ideal moment to place the Commonwealth network higher up the agenda – reigniting old ties, reinforcing current ones, and creating ones anew. This can start in our schools. Rather than ambivalence towards the Commonwealth, it is vital that the Government is proactive and supports a set of materials that truly encourage a change in perceptions.

II Create a Commonwealth app

“There’s an app for that” was part of a 2010 Apple iPhone advert campaign.⁶⁰ This has spawned numerous internet memes and jokes. However, behind this humour, the slogan does pose an important question for businesses, governments, and people looking to generate more notoriety and open up access to their core content for the iPhone generation. In sum it asks: “Do you have an app?” This question can be applied to the Commonwealth, especially given its need to connect with young people. The answer is clear – there is currently no app specifically related to the Commonwealth.

Therefore, our recommendation is for the design of an app focused on young people and the classroom. However, why should an app be designed? The answer is multi-faceted. The first issue concerns finding a platform for the Commonwealth that is accessible to young people. The 2014 edition of an annual OFCOM survey shows that seven in ten UK children aged 5–15 have access to a tablet. This was an increase from 51% to 71% since 2013, while in the same age group usage had increased 20% since 2013, from 42% to 62%. Furthermore, ownership of tablets had almost doubled, with one in three 5–15-year-olds owning a tablet compared to one in five in 2013.

Added to this, in 2014 children were almost twice as likely to go online using a tablet (42% versus 23%) than in 2013. This is matched through online use via mobile phones – up from 27% to 36% for 5–15-year-olds. This statistic increases greatly by age, with 59% of 12–15-year-olds going online using a mobile.⁶¹ This shows that mobiles and tablets are becoming a more important mainstay of young Britons’ digital activity. Having a Commonwealth space on these platforms would allow an opportunity for young people to learn about the Commonwealth in ways that they regularly, and increasingly, use.

There are those who may take the view that apps are just a fad and that they provide no wider educational function. This attitude is being challenged in the UK’s education community. Research by the British Educational Suppliers Association (BESA) on tablets in schools has shown that there is pupil interest in educational apps, with three quarters of those surveyed expressing such an interest, while over 40% have shown an interest in tablets, and no teacher stated that they had no children interested in using apps.⁶²

The same report shows that usage of tablet devices in UK primary and secondary schools rose 70% from 2012 to 2013, with a further projected rise from 430,000 to almost 900,000 between 2014 and 2016. One headteacher has been quoted as saying:

“I think it’s really important that schools function in the way that the world is.”⁶³

This is equally true of Commonwealth teaching. Furthermore, the BESA report predicted that 40% of “ICT learning time” would be covered by educational apps by 2020.⁶⁴ This was echoed by another headteacher, who said that:

“This latest development is no big deal for children; using electronic devices is second nature to them and, increasingly, they expect to have access to them at school... It is a natural and necessary next step for teachers to embrace the technology.”⁶⁵

An app keeps information simple and to the point. A desktop website often has myriad information, while an app reduces data to the key points. An app is often easier to navigate, with a swipe of a button. As mentioned in our Commonwealth curriculum recommendation, there is a question around the cost of printing, distributing, and reissuing school text books. An app provides a



digital platform through which the Commonwealth curriculum can be uploaded and updated, and which young Britons can access on their tablets and mobile phones in schools as well as at home. The app could also sit on interactive white boards in classrooms.

Meanwhile, a website-only approach would mean that pupils could not access Commonwealth content or materials offline. An app would also offer a more interactive approach than a traditional textbook, such as the option to access Commonwealth videos, audio, and images (which could be updated regularly) and the ability to utilise other functions available on tablets and mobile phones. For instance, there is the possibility of exploring the option of user-generated content – for example, with schools uploading material as part of a wider Commonwealth school community – although this would have to be moderated.

Therefore, we can see that the general trend and mood are that this technology is here to stay and will continue to be integrated into the way in which subjects are taught at school. Production of a Commonwealth app compatible with use in schools would allow the Commonwealth to join others who are riding the crest of the wave in educational apps. Any delay will mean that the Commonwealth falls behind again, thereby lowering young Britons’ chance to discover the Commonwealth on their own technological terms.

An added reason for this suggestion is the state of the Young Commonwealth website run by ComSec. With a leading emphasis on friendship, equality, and diversity and pages dedicated to the Games and the Day, it possesses only two downloadable resources – the ubiquitous maps and flags – and in an uninspiring way. None of the content is user-led and young people cannot generate content. There is a quiz of ten questions, some of which actually recur in the same play-through. This top-down approach must change, as must the static nature of the information. Furthermore, little to no news or updates appear to be provided, which gives the user no reason to return to the page. This is certainly sub-standard. With this in mind a new app could help to refresh young Britons’ understanding of the Commonwealth.

What should the app look like?

We propose that the app should be usable both within and outside the classroom. This will be key to its overall usability. It could be split into two paths that overlap: firstly, a Commonwealth school syllabus available online and offline for pupils and teachers, and secondly a source for Commonwealth news and information for young people.

In the former, the app could have syllabus content to assist with Citizenship lessons in KS3 as well as History and Geography and beyond, but also more elementary info for those being introduced to the Commonwealth at a primary school level during Commonwealth Chat.

For instance, maps and national profiles could be linked to Google Maps or the CIA’s World Factbook. The app could be used in our Commonwealth Newsroom lesson idea, as just one example. Instead of the somewhat dry learning of facts, maps, and flags (although this made more interactive by swiping and tapping and the use of Google Maps), pupils could get the chance to learn what is currently going on in Commonwealth nations. Reading about a nation’s flag, population, or GDP per capita anchored to outdated stories is a boring and incoherent way to learn. An app would be a more creative way to offer Commonwealth content and would put the information in the today while also offering a current feeling about a nation – not just a snapshot of learnt facts.

In the latter path, the app could be broken down into further specific sections – top news stories from around the whole Commonwealth that also include sport, music, film, and TV. UK adults and children alike often get a poor dose of world news, which is mainly confined to the USA and Europe. Designing an algorithm for the app or having a content editor that selects news stories from major newspapers from around the Commonwealth would give the app’s users a chance to become more informed Commonwealth citizens. The ability to present all this information under one “roof” – or rather in a child’s pocket or school bag – makes this prospect far more achievable.

This could be accomplished by working with the BBC and its World Service and other press agencies to “push” their appropriate content to the app. The BBC News app is already a great source of news and should be praised. Of equal merit is the CNN News app, which neatly breaks down news by region and is easily “swipable”. CNN also allows users to share stories quickly and easily via email or social media. This allows for content to gather traction online, which gives friends and followers the opportunity to read what you’re reading, which in turn would in a Commonwealth app make more young Britons learn about the Commonwealth. An app is certainly possible as the BBC already has a modern partnership with ComSec after the 2014 *Commonwealth Class*. Starting discussion with the BBC at an early development stage will allow for better results.

The target age range is a paramount consideration. Any Commonwealth content must be tailored to a youthful audience. A reproduction of the BBC’s news is in no one’s interest. However, the BBC’s NewsBeat webpage (www.bbc.co.uk/newsbeat/topics),



which is dedicated to young Britons, provides an example that the Commonwealth app's news function could follow. NewsBeat allows news to be easily displayed by *latest*, *popular*, and *topics*. *Topics* shows the top four stories in certain areas such as entertainment, music, politics, tech, sport, and money.

This is not just valuable in terms of traditional news. Discovering new sports teams, musicians, books, or films provides even greater opportunities. For example, learning what is top of the charts in music or books in other Commonwealth nations such as Ghana, India, and Malaysia could provide young Britons with a better-rounded cultural experience as well as offer new artists the chance to break into the UK market. The same goes for sport. Why stop at supporting UK or European teams?

The app could also be personalised for each user in a similar way to what is possible in BBC News, which allows individuals to select specific categories on which they wish to see news. In the Commonwealth context these categories could be a specific region or nation, or a topic such as sport or music. Importantly, the app should provide opportunities to be interactive. Cold and stale content will not appeal to young people. Content must be updated regularly to avoid a drop in demand or popularity.

One potential issue is cost of designing such an app. The figures range significantly and it is quite difficult to determine a price without actually going through the process of consulting an app-designing business with a view to purchasing. We briefly researched a number of online sources to aid the initial process. One expert blog shows that development of a medium-level iPad app costs \$100,000. This can jump to \$150,000 for a complex app. The blog also provided a breakdown of the process of designing, development, and maintenance.⁶⁶

One website asked industry specialists for the average cost of an app. It was told around \$150,000 and that:

“A lot of people say, ‘Oh no, that’s kind of crazy. It shouldn’t cost more than 50 grand to build an app.’ ‘Well, go ahead and try and hire two developers, one back end, one front end. With even \$50k, if you’re paying a competitive salary, you’ll last two and a half months, maybe less.’⁶⁷

We also used an app estimator from Crew.com, which gave us a basic quote of \$50,000, which is about £32,800.⁶⁸ Thus, developing an app is certainly a significant outlay if produced at a high standard.

There is an alternative design model that could be explored – web apps. These are apps that are available through a web browser and geared to mobile or tablet devices. This is a cheaper and more accessible option because the content is available to all users – not just those with Apple’s App Store and Google Play – and can be accessed on any tablet, mobile, or laptop with a web browser. It would also be easier to update the news sections of the proposed app if a web format were used.

However, a web app would need an internet connection to access the data just like any website, whereas in a downloadable app it is possible to have stored content – such as the school syllabus or the map function – accessible offline. Notably, the inventor of the World Wide Web, Tim Berners-Lee, who advocates for a more open web platform, has said: ‘the solution is in your hands: develop web apps, not apps!’⁶⁹ However, it is not in the scope of this report to play out the merits or demerits of each option other than to make readers aware that a decision will have to be made on the approach to Commonwealth learning online.

The initial outlay notwithstanding, the Commonwealth does require an educational resource that is accessible to young people through a means that they recognise and that is fit for 2015 and beyond. Syncing the app with our suggested national curriculum teaching on the Commonwealth would bolster its value among schools. It could be a digital avenue to connect the Commonwealth through greater understanding of its diverse needs and factors that affect its people. Making it the go-to place for Commonwealth content would create a space to see the world as having a Commonwealth dimension, making that dimension harder to ignore. It would also put the Commonwealth in young Britons’ pockets, not just in the classroom.

III Reintroduce a Commonwealth pen pal scheme (Commonwealth Chat)

As is shown in our history section, a pen pal scheme has existed; it was administered by the Commonwealth Linking Trust from the 1970s until the 1990s. When people think back to a traditional pen friend, this invariably involves writing letters by hand to someone overseas of a similar age. It may also have included printed photographs taken on a film camera. Items took weeks if not months to reach their destinations, as did replies.

Since the late 1990s, the world has changed beyond recognition. In the developed world personal computers became readily available, the internet took off, and connection speeds increased rapidly. Email started to become the standard medium of written communication. Contact with colleagues, friends, and family that had previously taken days, weeks, or months could now be achieved



in a matter of minutes. As for images, cameras switched to digital and media could be sent via email.

Then came mobile phones, followed by smart phones and tablets, which together pushed all these advancements into the pockets of millions of individuals around the world. Social media such as Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube made instantaneous communication even more accessible at the touch or swipe of a touchscreen.

The relevance of this technological recap to the Commonwealth is that these advances have brought the people of the Commonwealth closer than ever before. In the past five years, those from the Commonwealth’s emerging and developing economies have been sharing in these spoils. Internet and mobile phone penetration in Commonwealth Asia and Africa has grown speedily and will continue to do so. Closer interaction is possible between large sections of the Commonwealth.

The world in which the Linking Trust functioned no longer exists. Communication is now cheaper, easier, and quicker. This presents us with an opportunity to create a 21st-century Commonwealth pen pal system (Commonwealth Chat) between UK and Commonwealth school children. Despite all of these advances, young people have barely become more connected with one another across the Commonwealth. Few have a friend or friends in Commonwealth countries. Providing a pen pal platform could play a leading role in creating global citizens in touch with others as well as creating Commonwealth friends for life. This is intrinsically a positive goal.

How would Commonwealth chat work?

Putting the rhetoric to one side, how might Commonwealth Chat manifest itself practically? We propose that it is piloted in UK primary schools nationwide for Year 5 pupils. We suggest pupils aged 10 because they will be able to communicate effectively in written English without prompting from a teacher. This is also a year before certain pupils take the 11+ or other entrance-level exams, which need careful attention, while younger ages may struggle to write and communicate independently.

Crucially, the language that unites the Commonwealth is English. It provides an opportunity for those outside the UK to test their English skills with other young people from around the Commonwealth. In the majority of Commonwealth primary schools English is taught as the main language due to its educational and international benefits as the world’s lingua franca.

Furthermore, an instruction pack could be designed for both teachers and pupils to aid the scheme. We envisage that children would have the opportunity to talk about their lives, family, music, TV, films, sports, lessons at school, and many more subjects. However, pupils with no background knowledge of the Commonwealth will struggle to understand why this is being asked of them. We suggest that one or two introductory lessons are provided to introduce children to the Commonwealth. Such lessons could take the form of the ideas put forward in our first recommendation.

There is scope in the UK primary school curriculum to have a 20-minute time slot each week or fortnight in which pupils can log on throughout Year 5. It would help to strengthen their ICT skills and to develop their citizenship, historical, and geographical understanding, but above all enable them to make a lasting friend from a Commonwealth country.

The school-linking element is critical in terms of delivery. With no central body like the Linking Trust of old, there will have to be another mechanism in place to fulfil this role. One option is to manage it through the Royal Commonwealth Society’s Queen’s Commonwealth Essay Competition, which is the oldest writing competition in the world. Almost a thousand schools across the Commonwealth are already engaged in the programme and the Royal Commonwealth Society receives some 12,000 entries each year. Introducing a digital space for children already participating in the competition to interact would provide a safe environment with school supervision for children to speak to Commonwealth citizens their own age.

Additionally, the British Council runs a school-linking service internationally in which a wide range of schools are from Commonwealth nations. For example, if the British Council could pair up a British primary school with one in Kenya, this could lead to a relationship that eventually transcends Commonwealth Chat and might even allow pupil and teacher exchanges (on which more in a later section). The British High Commissions could also advertise this scheme and encourage Commonwealth schools to sign up. At bottom, this is not about creating a mini-bureaucracy to attempt to micromanage the process. If the British Council service can be utilised then it should be set up to work in conjunction with others, if required.

Once a school link had been established, teachers from each school could pair up pupils based on a quick assessment of likes and dislikes. After the children had been introduced, pupils would start Commonwealth Chat by predominantly writing emails and attaching photos, audio clips, and video clips, some of which may have been taken on their smart phones. The teacher could check these emails and attachments and then, once agreed, send them.

The emails would be in the child’s inbox waiting to be read when the other school had its fortnightly Commonwealth Chat time



slot. We suggest fortnightly as not every child in certain Commonwealth nations will have access to a computer so having a class of 30 children replying to individual emails will take more time than in the UK.

The financial cost of this scheme would be negligible – the cost of an internet connection, data charges, an email address, and the use of the school computer. Gone are the days of postage costs, waiting for delivery, and pen and paper.

Building on this, we suggest the creation of opportunities for live online meetings as a whole class or in small groups. This instantaneous relationship is paramount. It is also easy to achieve through modern technology such as Apple's FaceTime, Microsoft's Skype, and Google+ Hangouts, which allow multiple users in one online space.⁷⁰ Notably, Princes William and Harry have used Hangouts for the Queen's Young Leaders competition.⁷¹ As the saying goes, if it is good enough for a prince...

The largest obstacle, minus any difficulties accessing the technology and teachers finding time in the school timetable, is Commonwealth time zones – especially in attempting anything live such as Hangouts. Eastern Canada and the Caribbean are five hours behind GMT, but western Canada is challengingly at -. Commonwealth Africa is not a problem, at GMT+1 or 2. The Indian sub-continent is just about achievable in a school day at around GMT+5; however, countries further east in Asia are challenging at GMT+8, and Australia falls between GMT+8 and 10 and New Zealand and the rest of Oceania are at GMT+12. However, if the pen pal scheme is primarily based on email, such difficulties are removed, as email can be sent and received in the respective schools' time, while class videos could be recorded instead of having live events.

At this juncture, it is important to reiterate that this would not be an expensive exercise if allowed to employ off-the-peg commercial platforms. Designing an online portal or an intranet to govern Commonwealth Chat would be asking for the kind of digital blunder that often befalls government agencies and departments. As we know, the Commonwealth is not immune to these mistakes.

We also do not want this to be a one-off. The aim is to make Commonwealth Chat a mainstay in the Year 5 curriculum. Every 10-year-old whose school adopts the scheme should have the opportunity to have a Commonwealth friend. We recommend a pilot of 100 schools in the UK to be paired with 100 in the Commonwealth. At 60 pupils in Year 5 that would make 6,000 young people per annum – certainly an achievement. Building on this, those 10-year-olds who make a Commonwealth friend should be afforded the chance to stay in contact after the year is over. Adding one another on Facebook, following each other on Twitter, playing video games online, or even swapping personal email addresses are just a few ways to make this happen. This need not remain solely a classroom activity.

The overarching rationale for Commonwealth Chat is that it would make the Commonwealth connection live. It would be interactive and participatory. The children would be the drivers of the content. It would not be just another lesson learnt from a textbook on dry facts and figures. We want young Britons to have the chance to learn first hand about Commonwealth nations and their young people. What better way than to connect with them.

IV Design an attainable Commonwealth Youth Exchange programme

As we explained in our history section, the recent termination of the 40-year Youth Exchange programme due to British Council funding reductions is a painful reality. Equally, the teacher exchange scheme that expanded throughout the 1970s and 1980s has now been reduced to Australia, Canada, and the UK and must be individually funded. Therefore, any calls for a restoration of these schemes with state-sponsored funds will find a near impossible task. Whatever the claims and counter-claims of the decisions behind the defunding, this is where the programme finds itself.

Despite the enhanced possibilities for interactive textbooks and our Commonwealth Chat idea, there is no substitute for actually seeing a Commonwealth nation. That is why the exchanges were paramount to underpinning the Commonwealth experience. However, visiting is the ultimate Commonwealth connection.

There is an unparalleled value in exchanges, so a short-term solution could be to try to resurrect the scheme by offering it on a smaller scale, individual basis to a handful of students in a school or across a country but requiring them to fundraise for themselves. This method is used for the Global Young Leaders Conference. Although different in its programme, its objectives are similar: developing cross-cultural understanding for future young leaders. The model is successful and could provide a sustainable example for Commonwealth school exchanges.

Difficulties, or rather realities, will arise with the bilateral nature of reformed exchanges. UK pupils may be able to visit other Commonwealth schools, but, given the current economic disparities between the majority of Commonwealth nations, the scheme may well have to be one-way. This is not ideal, but in our view it is more favourable to have a version of an exchange than none at



all. Its raison d'être should be to lift young Britons' horizons by enabling them to experience the potential of the Commonwealth – its people and its nations.

We acknowledge that this approach does lend itself to those wealthier pupils in the UK and in other Commonwealth nations. A partial solution to re-energising the scheme could be to build links between two Commonwealth schools, perhaps using the British Council's links approach. A regular partnership could encompass annual trips between a number of selected pupils. As stated previously, the detailed materials produced by the Commonwealth Youth Exchange Council are still available online and can be distributed to interested schools for them to use as a template. The individual funding method exists for the ongoing Commonwealth Teacher Exchange Programme and could be used for pupil exchanges, although the like-for-like swap element would prove difficult.

There is potential to upscale the individual funding option over time through greater bilateral school partnerships. For example, if five pupils each from 20 UK schools could visit Commonwealth schools for a week or two, these 100 pupils' positive experiences could encourage more UK secondary schools to participate. The redesigned national curriculum resources, including the app we have recommended, should therefore include options for a sustainable and deliverable exchange.

The longer-term goal would be look for a government funding mechanism to restore the programme to its previous heights. We recognise the British Council's position after the recession was that it needed to use its government grants in-house rather than investing in third parties no matter how worthy the cause. We note its own examples supporting youth exchanges, notably Wellington School in Scotland with St Edmund's in India:

“The main benefit of the exchange for the pupils is cultural awareness...our students' academic studies are now underpinned by experiencing real examples of life in India. It is through seeing these issues, and not just reading about them in textbooks, that real understanding develops. The exchange improved our students' social skills and their understanding of how to behave in a different society.”⁷²

Offering a Commonwealth ethos to the programme would certainly help to advance the Commonwealth as a brand to schools and young Britons. Including support from the Royal Commonwealth Society would go some way in achieving this status, especially if the funding were on an individual pupil basis.

In terms of government options the Department for Education, the DfID, and/or the FCO could pool some resources, but the continued need to implement departmental reductions implies an environment where programmes will be wound up and not given a new lease of life. ComSec could provide some of its funding to youth exchanges, which would be a visible way for it to renew its commitment to youth affairs. The CET could equally do so, but its expressed remit to not help UK schools exclusively is a barrier despite the explicit nature of the scheme as an exchange. Another option is to suggest at the next CHOGM, in Malta, that youth exchanges be discussed with a view to setting up a new fund from existing sources to pilot the scheme. The UK should be encouraged play a leadership role in this commitment.

V Establish a Commonwealth graduate careers fair

At the tertiary level of education, the Commonwealth is actually well served. The best example of this is the Commonwealth Scholarships programme primarily funded by the DfID; this programme helps Commonwealth students to study in the UK. It is open to UK students aiming to study abroad but far fewer students take up this option.

However, as we highlighted in our report *How to Solve a Problem like a Visa*, there are acute difficulties regarding Commonwealth students being granted visas to study. In addition, the abolition of the Tier 1 Post-study Work Visa has in effect meant that Commonwealth students have to leave the UK as soon as they have finished at a university if they have not been fortunate enough to find a graduate job straight away. This has been described by Sir James Dyson as a policy where “we take their money, we give them our knowledge, and then we kick them out”. It is not in the scope or focus of this report to go into detail on this point; however, we urge the Government to find solutions for legitimate students that enable them to win a place at a university, receive a Commonwealth scholarship, and then secure the appropriate visa. There have been many cases explained to us where the first two were granted and yet the individual falls at the visa hurdle.

Turning specifically to UK universities, an approach to understanding the Commonwealth akin to primary and secondary school lessons is certainly not appropriate. Notwithstanding, we take the view that enacting a number of our recommendations over time, decades even, will mean that UK students will eventually arrive at university with a greater understanding of the Commonwealth network and the opportunities that it has provided and could continue to provide.



As for this generation, we propose a more work- or business-oriented attitude to help in the short term – a graduate careers fair. This is a small-scale but achievable policy in which large businesses would be invited to participate in a careers fair similar to those that take place in universities up and down the country each year, but with a specific focus on Commonwealth markets. A number of key international businesses in various fields run operations or have footfall in the UK and a number of Commonwealth nations.

Having the opportunity to recruit top British and Commonwealth graduates from UK universities into businesses' Commonwealth offices would provide a two-fold benefit. For the graduates it would open up the prospect of working abroad but in a working environment that has identifiable similarities with British methods. It would lift their horizons from the shores of the UK and Europe and towards more global ambitions. The Commonwealth network could provide such a boost. Studying abroad or taking a gap year can be useful in this regard, but an actual job or career abroad offers a more substantial gain. The former approach is akin to telling young people to sample or try something new. However, for the Commonwealth to be truly inspiring it needs young people to make a meaningful purchase, not just take a promotional sample. Encouraging graduates to do this early in their career is certainly one such way for this to be achieved.

Recent graduates are probably the most footloose they will ever be in their lives having left the family home: many are not tied down by long-term relationships, their housing situation is fluid, and the full-time-employment market is relatively new to them. Attending a prospective graduate fair presents to the students the chance to experience the Commonwealth network in a business and career setting that, once knowledgeable, they may take through the rest of their careers.

For example, take the legal profession. Studying English common law at a UK university may offer graduates the chance to work in a legal practice in Jamaica, Singapore, or South Africa, given the similarities of these countries' legal structures to that of the UK. The same could be said of any accounting practice in a Commonwealth country operating under the traditional British system. This could be extended to many other professions such as the media, advertising, or teaching where English is the major working language of the country, but also to scientific fields, where top UK graduates are in demand.

In terms of the second benefit, for businesses themselves, a fair geared towards their international market has many positives. Recruiting from the top students at British universities for their international operations in Commonwealth nations is a solid foundation for businesses, and the talent pool of highly skilled labour stemming from the UK university system is among the best in the world. Furthermore, selecting Commonwealth citizens who attended British universities allows employers to secure the knowledge and expertise of individuals who have experience of two markets.

It also has the added effect of getting international business to buy into the Commonwealth as a practical business concept. Studies have shown the 20% reduction in business costs that can be achieved between Commonwealth nations, but in order for this to be enhanced having a cross-over of labour is crucial. Furthermore, trust is fundamental to business. It helps to mitigate risk. Creating human Commonwealth links through business could be a benefit to employers, especially those that wish to break into emerging or developing markets (of which the Commonwealth has many) but also those employers looking to solidify their market share in developed nations.

With the rationale firmly established, what would a Commonwealth graduate careers fair look like and who could participate? For ease, any future fair should follow the tried-and-tested methods of other graduate fairs, which usually involve the use of the university's main hall or students' union over one or two days. A Commonwealth variant could be piloted to assess uptake from both employers and students alike. We suggest a roll-out to Russell Group universities that show an interest.

As for prospective businesses, we reviewed current participants in careers fairs across top UK universities that have an international dimension to their work. These include AON, AstraZeneca, BAE Systems, Barclays, BDO, the British Army, CPA Australia, Dell, Deloitte, Ernst & Young, Facebook, HSBC, IBM, Kellogg's, KPMG, Procter & Gamble, PWC, the RAF, the Royal Navy, Vodafone, and a plethora of international law firms. This list is by no means exhaustive but these businesses appear in a number of Russell Group university career fairs.⁷³

These fairs occur throughout the school year. Most universities appear to have autumn and summer versions. Therefore, it would be up to the organisation that provided the fair to liaise with universities and business on availability and to avoid any clashes. Interestingly, we found that Warwick has an international careers fair. With the majority of fairs geared to the UK market, a Commonwealth one modelled on the Warwick version could flourish.

In terms of delivery there are a few options. Organisations with strong university connections, such as the Commonwealth Scholarship Commission, may wish to run the suggested scheme, though their ability to do so may depend on their capacity. Given the position of ComSec as the public body of the Commonwealth, it could take on the provision of such a careers fair. Many of these fairs have



a principal sponsor and are delivered jointly with the universities. Therefore, another option could be for a collection of groups with Commonwealth, business, and educational stakes to interlink in supporting this scheme.

In conclusion, a Commonwealth careers fair would be a cost-effective and small-scale initiative that could be an influential means to broaden the understanding of the Commonwealth in a practical and business sense for graduates, businesses, and universities collectively. It could allow the Commonwealth to not just be global in a geographic sense but also in a business one. Through this particular recommendation, UK graduates would be able to benefit hugely from the Commonwealth possibilities on offer and we urge that a pilot scheme is undertaken.



/Conclusion/

Throughout this report we have clearly shown why young Britons' education about the Commonwealth needs to be addressed. Our polling demonstrates that their understanding of this network of 2.3 billion people from all across the world is low. Our recommendations provide practical policy proposals to allow British school children to re-join a Commonwealth that must be rejuvenated through technology. Our history section highlights the demise of numerous organisations that used to deliver Commonwealth educational services and the problems, but also the opportunities, that vacancy now poses. The current set of materials is in rapid need of reform in terms of structure, content, and supply. There is a gap in this provision that must be bridged.

With this firmly in mind, the Government must be not ambivalent to Commonwealth learning. Its recent departmental answers read otherwise. It cannot allow British pupils to leave school with a one-sided or isolated view of the world. The same must be said of other Commonwealth organisations, such as the Secretariat, which must engage with the process of renewing resources to offer more focus on trade and prosperity, not just the Games every four years or political structures.

The potential of the Commonwealth is its young population – 60% of the 2.3 billion Commonwealth residents are under age 30. Therefore, if the UK is to interact with the Commonwealth, it should start in schools, not government circles. Our Commonwealth Chat would help to create not just school friends but ideally friends for life, would-be business partners, or even family members. The Commonwealth functions best when it is human, connected, and decentralised.

We need new, innovative Commonwealth materials in UK schools that utilise technological advancements that can also be easily and effectively distributed to schools. We stress that this must not be a political exercise. Solutions have to be organic and anchored in relationships, and must ultimately be forward looking. It is no help learning about the Commonwealth in History in a way that only reaffirms its supposed relic status.

Meanwhile, despite the loss of physical space for Commonwealth organisations with an educational remit, the Commonwealth can fill the void in the digital space with modern resources. Instead of trying to drag young people to expansive and outdated textbooks, it will be much easier to engage them on modern platforms where they already consume knowledge.

Additionally, there is a latent Commonwealth legacy that resides not only in the UK's wonderfully diverse diaspora but also all over the Commonwealth. What is lacking is the spark to generate lasting interactions.

In terms of policy, Commonwealth Chat could work and is certainly achievable in the short term – gone are the days of postage cost, postal times, and pen and paper. Contemporary Commonwealth resources are required as a priority but will realistically take until the new school year in 2016 to fund and produce. An app would be beneficial in order to tap into the educational zeitgeist. Restoration of a youth exchange is vital but is a longer-term project and may well involve Commonwealth funding. And a careers fair would add a business dimension, which is currently lacking, to lift horizons to Commonwealth markets and offer value to young people.

What is left of the Commonwealth's organisations with a stake in education must take responsibility. If more young people do not learn about the Commonwealth, further generations will grow up unknowing and ultimately bypass the Commonwealth potential to connect with one another. We have endeavoured to provide a modern path for young Britons to tap, swipe, and click their way to a great new Commonwealth discovery.





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I'm delighted that Commonwealth Exchange are leading the charge in raising awareness of the Commonwealth amongst our children.

If the Commonwealth is to have a sustainable future, it is vital that young people understand not only it's history, but also why the Commonwealth is relevant to the world today. I very much welcome this report and hope it triggers a real shift in how our schools discuss the Commonwealth.

/Lord Popat/



A general wish that there should be more Commonwealth education in British schools has long been around in policy circles. But there it seems to stop. The wish has failed to give birth to the ideas or the actions to make it happen. This must change. The authors of this paper now provide the detailed ways in which a new interactive awareness between pupils across the whole Commonwealth can be developed and spread.

/Lord Howell/

The report shows clearly that young Britons' lack of comprehension of the Commonwealth is a cause for concern, but its recommendations offer policy-makers an action plan to reverse the trend. Young people at school in the UK need to hear the Commonwealth story – one that is of stirring wonder and adventure. It must lift young Britons' horizons to see Commonwealth nations as a source of opportunity and prosperity.



/Frank Field MP/