

Saved by the Bell

UK school children's understanding of the Commonwealth



"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



Why teach about the Commonwealth?

It matters because it is in the UK's DNA, not just the past. It is about connecting the UK to the rapidly changing world and this is critical to children's development as global citizens. We are also too often unfamiliar of what goes on in Commonwealth nations, what is important to them, and how we might be able to work together. However, technological advancement has made connecting with the Commonwealth quicker, cheaper, and easier.

A brief history of Commonwealth education

- 1960s**
Main resource – *Schools and the Commonwealth (1961)* from the Department of Education. Noted: "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"
- 1970s**
 - Commonwealth Youth Exchange Council created. Helped over 1,700 children a year go on 102 exchange visits.
 - Commonwealth Linking Trust established. Worked on pen pals schemes.
 - Commonwealth Day created (1976) for all Commonwealth children.
- 1980s**
 - Move away from History and Geography to a focus on Commonwealth Day.
 - National Curriculum implemented (1989). No Commonwealth mention.
- 1990s**
 - UK Government said it would no longer fund the CI (1992).
 - Meant the CI's obligation to about about the Commonwealth in UK ceased.
 - National Curriculum (1999) included the Commonwealth in Citizenship. At a time when the Commonwealth's institutions and the availability of sources decreased.
- 2000s**
 - Commonwealth Games in Manchester (2002) saw shift in focus in Commonwealth educational materials towards the Games.
 - Commonwealth Institute shuts down (2004).
- 2010s**
 - Commonwealth Youth Exchanges ended due to British Council withdrawing funds (2013).

Main resource – *Antigua to Zambia (2011)* by the Royal Commonwealth Society. Still available online.
Commonwealth Class (2014) for the Glasgow Games by British Council, BBC, and ComSec. Cost £1.5m.

Polling of British school children (YouGov - July 2015)

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



ONLY 7% Could identify the Commonwealth flag.

Implies that flag has poor brand awareness

Q2. Have you learnt about the Commonwealth in any lesson at school?



Geography 11%



History 8%



Citizenship 6%

Nearly 50% say they have *not* learnt about the Commonwealth in school

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



50% correctly identified the Queen

Nearly 4 in 10 weren't able to guess

57% (Aged 18-35) | **75%** (Aged 35+)
Royal Commonwealth Society polling 2010

Young Britons' understanding of the Commonwealth

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

Only 23% could correctly select 3 Commonwealth nations



45% Identified Canada



38% Identified India



24% Incorrectly selected Ireland

Q5. Do you have any friends who you know live in a Commonwealth country?

7/10 do not have a friend in a Commonwealth country



13% had an Australian friend, **8%** Canadian, **4%** South African

LONDON'S DIFFERENTIAL...

10% have an Indian friend (**3%** nationally),

7% Pakistani (**2%** nationally), **6%** Nigerian (**2%** nationally)

Our Recommendations

I Update Commonwealth Curriculum resources

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

1. Enhancing global citizenship and understanding of the UK's soft power.
2. Dispelling the myth that the Commonwealth is out-dated.
3. Connecting young Commonwealth people together.

How could the Commonwealth be taught?

Using digital materials for use on smart boards in school:

- **Citizenship** – Already has a small place on the syllabus, but is rarely taught. Main teaching focus on Key Stage 3 (11-14).
- **ICT** – Create a Commonwealth Newsroom project and our Commonwealth Chat pen pal scheme. (See pages 29 & 32).
- **History** – Do not want to see Commonwealth taught as something primarily of the past. Focus on Commonwealth contributions in WWI & II and decolonisation.
- **Geography** – Focus on the Commonwealth diaspora; current economic & environmental challenges; physical geography of the Commonwealth; and Commonwealth exploration and discovery.

II Create a Commonwealth app

There is currently no app exclusively on the Commonwealth. Missing a huge opportunity when:

- Seven in ten UK children aged 5-15 have access to a tablet.
- In this age group usage has increased 20% from 2013 to 2014 (42% to 62%).
- Ownership of tablets in 5-15 year-olds has almost doubled to one in three.
- Tablet device use in UK primary and secondary schools rose 70% between 2012-2014 with a projected rise of from 430,000 to almost 900,000 between 2014-2016.

Shows mobiles and tablets are becoming an important mainstay of young Britons' digital activity.

A Commonwealth space on these platforms would allow young people to learn about the Commonwealth in ways that they regularly use and increasingly do so.

The general trend is that this technology is here to stay and will continue to be integrated into the way in which subjects are taught.

III Reintroduce a Commonwealth pen pal scheme (Commonwealth Chat)

- A modern Commonwealth pen pal scheme piloted for Year 5 pupils.
- Since the late 1990s emails, 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. Communication is now cheaper, easier, and quicker.
- English is the language that unites the Commonwealth making communication more feasible.
- Can be trialled through schools that participate in the Royal Commonwealth Society's Queen's Commonwealth Essay Competition.
- Rationale for the scheme is to increase the number of those with a friend in a Commonwealth country and to make the Commonwealth connection live and interactive.

IV Design an attainable Commonwealth youth exchange programme

No substitute for actually seeing a Commonwealth nation. Calls for a full restoration of previous exchange schemes with state sponsored funds will find a near impossible task.

Short term - Resurrect the scheme by offering it on a smaller scale individual or one-way basis through personal funding and school links created by Commonwealth Chat.

Long term - Commonwealth Secretariat could provide some of its funding. The Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) in Malta this year provides an opportunity for governments to discuss a new fund from existing sources.

V Establish a Commonwealth graduate careers fair

A fair similar to those which take place in universities up and down the country each year, but with a specific focus on Commonwealth countries.

Warwick University already has an international careers fair; therefore, a Commonwealth variant could be trialled.

Two-fold benefit:

- **Businesses** – recruit from a pool of highly skilled graduates for their international offices in Commonwealth nations. Allows employers the knowledge and expertise of Commonwealth citizens who have experience in two markets.
- **Graduates** – opens up the prospects of working abroad. Lifts their horizons to more global ambitions.



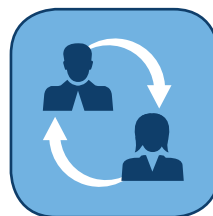
Curriculum



App



Chat



Exchange



Career



twitter.com/the_CX #CWeducation

Conclusion: British pupils should not leave school with a one-sided or isolated view of the world. Therefore, if the UK is to interact with the Commonwealth, it should start in schools not just government circles. We propose a modern path for young Britons to tap, swipe, and click their way to a great new Commonwealth rediscovery.

www.Commonwealth-Exchange.org | events@Commonwealth-Exchange.org | facebook.com/CommonwealthExchangeCX

