



House of Commons
Foreign Affairs Committee

Global Britain and the 2018 Commonwealth Summit: Government response to the Committee's Seventh Report

**Eleventh Special Report of Session
2017–19**

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The Foreign Affairs Committee

The Foreign Affairs Committee is appointed by the House of Commons to examine the expenditure, administration, and policy of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and its associated public bodies.

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Publication

Committee reports are published on the Committee's website at www.parliament.uk/facom and in print by Order of the House.

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Committee staff

The current staff of the Committee are Tom Goldsmith and Hannah Bryce (Clerks), Dr Ariella Huff (Senior Committee Specialist), Dr Matthew Harries, Ashlee Godwin, Emma Makey, Dr Eoin Martin and Hannah Stone (Committee Specialists), Clare Genis (Senior Committee Assistant), Zara Emmett and Matthew Chappell (Committee Assistants) and Estelle Currie (Media Officer).

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Eleventh Special Report

On 5 April 2018, the Foreign Affairs Committee published its Seventh Report of Session 2017–19, on Global Britain and the 2018 Commonwealth Summit (HC 831). The response was received on 4 July 2018. The response is appended as below.

Appendix: Government Response

Introduction

This Government takes note of the Foreign Affairs Committee report on ‘Global Britain and the 2018 Commonwealth Summit’, published on 5 April 2018.

This report sets out the Government’s response to each of the Committee’s conclusions and recommendations. The Committee’s text is in **bold** and the Government’s response is in plain text. Paragraph numbers refer to the Committee’s report.

Section 1: The FCO’s strategic vision for the Summit and the UK’s tenure as Chair

7. **We welcome the Government’s ambition to deliver the largest ever Commonwealth Summit. But the Summit is simply the start of a process. During the Summit, the UK will become the Commonwealth Chair-in-Office, a position it will hold until 2020. It is not solely for the UK as host of the Summit or as Chair-in-Office to dictate the agenda and direction of the Commonwealth, which is an organisation based on consensus among its 53 members. But the UK will have a unique position of leadership and influence. It is imperative that the UK starts its tenure as Chair-in-Office with clear aims for what it wants to achieve by 2020. This demands a credible strategy, with specific objectives and metrics for success.**

8. **In its response to this Report, the FCO should provide the Committee with a statement of its priorities and objectives for the UK’s tenure as Chair-in-Office, and the metrics it will use to judge success when the UK hands over the Chair to Malaysia in 2020. In April 2019, the FCO should provide the Committee with a mid-term account of progress thus far. This should take into account the priorities of the Overseas Territories and the Crown Dependencies. The devolved administrations should also be consulted, as appropriate.**

The Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) in London and Windsor in April was the largest gathering of its kind ever held in the UK, attended by 46 Heads of Government. It was a great success and demonstrated the enduring strength and relevance of this unique organisation in the 21st century.

It was however the beginning not the end of our role as Chair in Office. During the UK’s period as Chair in Office, we will work with the three pillars of the Commonwealth – our 52 fellow member states, the Commonwealth Secretariat, and its organisations and networks – to:

a) deliver the commitments set out in the official CHOGM communiqué and Leaders' statement, b) reinforce the three pillars of the Commonwealth including supporting continued reform of the Secretariat and c) promote the Commonwealth's place within the rules-based international system.

Prominent among our priorities will be: implementation of the Cyber Declaration, by helping developing countries to boost their cyber security capabilities; progress on plastic pollution, including through the Commonwealth Clean Oceans Alliance; implementation of specific actions to increase the provision of at least 12 years of quality education for all boys and girls (including the Foreign Secretary's Platform for Girls' Education, a group of twelve influential figures from across the Commonwealth and co-chaired by Amina Mohammed, the Kenyan Education Minister); marked progress towards the target of \$2tn intra-Commonwealth annual trade and investment by 2030, through e.g. implementation of the Commonwealth Standards Network, fostering innovation across the Commonwealth through the increased use of international standards; and finally being on track to halve the incidence of malaria in Commonwealth countries by 2023.

We will focus UK efforts on the four themes of sustainability, security, fairness and prosperity, each with its own sub-objectives. We will measure this using the metrics set out in the communiqué itself.

Delivery of outcomes in these priority areas falls variously to coalitions of member states, the Commonwealth as a whole, the Commonwealth Secretariat, or to the UK Government in partnership with civil society and international organisations. The Government will continue to track progress internally at regular senior official steering boards, chaired by the FCO-based UK Commonwealth Envoy, Philip Parham. The steering board will establish clear milestones, and ensure rigorous monitoring and evaluation of projects and programmes funded by the UK.

We will support the reform of the Commonwealth Secretariat, including the work of the High Level Group (HLG) chaired by Anote Tong, the former President of Kiribati. The Group's success will be judged by whether recommendations on the sustainable financing and governance of the Commonwealth Secretariat, including clear mechanisms for the appointment of Secretaries General, have been agreed and implemented by the time of the next CHOGM. Depending on the progress of the HLG we expect to have an initial discussion between Commonwealth Member States on its recommendations at the Commonwealth Foreign Ministers Meeting in September.

The FCO will be pleased to give the Committee a mid-term account of progress in April 2019. As we did ahead of the last CHOGM, we will continue to ensure that the views of the Devolved Administrations, the Overseas Territories and the Crown Dependencies are considered. Since CHOGM, we have shared the outcome documents with them, and have begun direct discussions with some of them about follow-up.

9. The FCO should consider the feasibility during the UK's tenure as Chair-in-Office of launching an online Commonwealth news channel to broadcast news coverage from Commonwealth national broadcasters. The FCO should report its conclusions to the Committee by 3 September 2018.

The FCO shares the Committee's view that it is important for the Commonwealth to showcase its work and successes as well as promoting understanding among the peoples

of the Commonwealth. We will continue to encourage Commonwealth organisations and networks including the Commonwealth Secretariat, and use our own networks to amplify the profile of the Commonwealth. We have considered carefully whether the Committee's proposed online Commonwealth news channel would be an effective way to do this, but have concluded that it would not.

Our assessment is that it would be disproportionately expensive to set up and maintain such a channel, in terms of both human and financial resource. Most online news channels are linked to pre-existing broadcast channels with their own infrastructures, resources and budget. We judge that individual agreements would need to be established with each broadcaster in each country for use of their footage on the proposed new channel. Even if such agreements could be reached with national broadcasters from across the Commonwealth, the online channel would require a full team for production and editorial control to manage what would be shown from which broadcaster and when.

The FCO also believes that there would be a limited audience for such a channel. It is increasingly the case that news – particularly amongst young people – is consumed through shorter, more accessible clips on social media rather than through national broadcasters on television. It is doubtful whether there would be a sufficient audience to ensure value for money. Those who are interested in news from other countries (Commonwealth or otherwise) will seek it at will, through easily available online means of search and selection.

Section 2: The FCO's Commonwealth Policy

20. We recognise that the work of numerous government departments touches on the Commonwealth. But if the UK is to exercise influence among, and harness the potential of, this diverse group of partners, it is essential that the FCO shows leadership. For the Commonwealth to be more than a collection of bilateral relationships, the FCO needs to clarify what it is about common membership of the Commonwealth that distinguishes the UK's relationships with the 52 other Commonwealth members and, on this basis, set out a long-term vision for the UK's relationship with the Commonwealth and its members. Only with such a long-term vision in place can the FCO coordinate the work of other government departments to ensure that the UK's relationship with the Commonwealth is more than the sum of its parts. Within the next three months, the FCO should provide this Committee with a statement of Her Majesty's Government's long-term vision for the UK's relationship with the Commonwealth and clarify what the 52 other members can expect from a post-Brexit 'Global Britain'. This statement should refer to the work of other government departments but must demonstrate how the FCO will lead the cross-Government relationship and in what ways the work of other departments will feed into the FCO's overall Commonwealth strategy.

As the Government set out in the National Security Capability Review in April, our Global Britain policy will strengthen our overseas network so that we can reinvest in our relationships around the world, champion the rules-based international system including free trade, and use our soft power to project our values and advance UK interests.

The Government's vision for our long term relationship with the Commonwealth is set in that broad context. Recognising that the Commonwealth is a voluntary association of 53

countries with equal voices, the UK will continue to be an activist, responsible member, committed to strengthening and renewing the Commonwealth as a unique network of countries and organisations delivering real outcomes for the common good.

- First, we will collaborate, in various configurations, with member states, the Secretariat, and Commonwealth-affiliated organisations to develop and implement world-leading policies designed to protect and promote the rules-based international system, and to increase the prosperity, sustainability, fairness and security of Commonwealth members and the wider international community.
- Second, we will continue to be a champion of reform, particularly reform designed to increase the effectiveness and efficiency of the Commonwealth Secretariat, as an organisation for the 21st century, delivering for member states and their citizens.
- Third, we will continue to support fellow member states to help them ensure that the shared values and principles enshrined in the Commonwealth Charter are realised for the people of the Commonwealth to the fullest extent possible.

In London, the FCO will lead the whole-government effort required to deliver this vision, and is well placed to do so. The newly appointed UK Commonwealth Envoy, Philip Parham, will chair a cross-Whitehall steering board, which will monitor departments' delivery against specific objectives, and feed into regular cross-Whitehall ministerial meetings to provide strategic oversight of progress in particular areas. The Envoy will also lead the FCO-based cross-Whitehall Commonwealth Unit, whose members will bring to bear the weight and expertise of their home departments.

Overseas, as the Foreign Secretary announced at CHOGM, the FCO will open nine new diplomatic posts in Commonwealth member states - Lesotho, Swaziland, The Bahamas, Antigua and Barbuda, Grenada, St Vincent and the Grenadines, Samoa, Tonga, and Vanuatu. These new posts will allow us to join and convene more regular Commonwealth dialogues, and to participate in action in and with those countries. In particular, this will reinforce our wider efforts to champion the voices of Commonwealth small states (for example, our increased support on trade and human rights for the Commonwealth Small States Office in Geneva). Opening missions in these countries will expand the UK's diplomatic network from 38 to 47 Commonwealth members - a practical demonstration of our ambition and intent to increase the resources which the Government is devoting to Commonwealth member states.

21. When the FCO lays out its long-term vision for the UK's relationship with the Commonwealth, it should consider the potential for a new institutionalised forum that allows legal practitioners from across the Commonwealth to come together to share best practice on implementing international human rights law and embedding the rule of law, and to identify common solutions to critical issues such as cyber security, data protection and online privacy. In doing so, the FCO should consult as necessary the Commonwealth Magistrates' and Judges' Association, and the Commonwealth Lawyers Association.

The FCO welcomes the Committee's recognition that human rights and the rule of law are central tenets of the Commonwealth Charter. It agrees that practical co-operation between

member states, and among legal practitioners and their accredited Commonwealth organisations, is of great benefit to the Commonwealth. Organisations such as the Commonwealth Magistrates' and Judges' Association and the Commonwealth Lawyers Association play an important role in promoting human rights law and the rule of law, including through their work developing and supporting implementation of the Latimer House principles on the separation of powers. We note, for example, the excellent UK-sponsored work of the Commonwealth Magistrates' and Judges' Association to support judicial training in The Gambia following that country's return to the Commonwealth earlier this year: this demonstrated the concrete benefits of Commonwealth membership in support of democratic principles. Those Commonwealth legal associations also provide effective fora for shared consideration of new legal challenges.

At member state level, the Commonwealth Law Ministers' Meeting (CLMM) provides a forum for discussion of relevant and topical legal issues affecting Commonwealth countries, including exchange of best practice between governments. As further fora for practitioners, we welcome the establishment of the Office for Civil and Criminal Justice Reform, and the Commonwealth Innovation Hub, announced by the Secretary General during CHOGM, providing a space for collaboration and the sharing of best practice in real time.

We therefore believe that sufficient fora are already in place to allow the sharing of best practice as suggested by the Committee.

22. In its response to this Report, the FCO should provide more detail about how it plans to build a Commonwealth caucus in the General Assembly and to leverage UK membership of the Commonwealth throughout the UN.

The Commonwealth has already demonstrated the value of its collective influence on many occasions, for example in delivering the largest ever inter-governmental commitment to cybersecurity cooperation at CHOGM 2018, and in sending a clear message of unity at CHOGM 2015 to help deliver the Paris climate agreement. However, although we share a set of values and principles, the breadth and diversity of member states means that consensus will often not be possible.

The adoption and voicing of common positions is not the only way in which the Commonwealth can demonstrate its value as a group of nations in other multilateral fora. We are focused on establishing Commonwealth groupings as a means, particularly for small states, to share information and expertise on international and global issues. In so doing, we support the implementation of treaties and recommendations from international bodies, and broaden participation in those institutions as pillars of the rules-based international system.

The FCO's diplomatic network supports this through convening, supporting and attending Commonwealth groupings in Commonwealth capitals including in London; through focused dialogue with Commonwealth member states in non-Commonwealth capitals; and finally through regular outreach at the UN and other international organisations in New York, Geneva and elsewhere. This will include supporting the Commonwealth Secretariat to drive forward Commonwealth initiatives in New York - including through advice, guidance and financial assistance to the Small States Office. This work will form part both of increased regular engagement, and of our preparation for set-piece events

such as UNGA (during which the Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group and Foreign Affairs Ministers regularly meet), Human Rights Council sessions, or specific Universal Periodic Reviews.

With respect to the UN and WTO in Geneva, we have announced a new £1.3m programme from 2018 to 2020 to establish resident human rights and trade advisers at the Commonwealth Small States Office there. Their responsibilities will include providing briefings to Commonwealth missions. They will liaise closely with human rights and trade staff in the UK Mission. We will also work with the Secretariat of the Pacific Community on a specific project in the Commonwealth Pacific to increase the voice and capacity of those small island states on human rights issues in international human rights mechanisms such as the Human Rights Council, Treaty Bodies and the Universal Periodic Review.

Section 3: FCO resources dedicated to the Commonwealth

28. In evidence to us, the FCO Minister of State for the Commonwealth emphasised the diversity of its 53 members. This undoubtedly enriches the organisation but harnessing the collective potential of this diverse group inevitably requires significant, long-term, frontline investment. The Foreign Secretary told us that the FCO has secured funding for 250 additional UK-based staff to be deployed in its overseas network and to open ten new Posts overseas, to support its 'Global Britain' campaign. This is welcome but it is not clear that the FCO sees the Commonwealth as a sufficiently high priority for 'Global Britain' to warrant significant additional investment beyond the Summit and the UK's tenure as Chair-in-Office. Without this additional, dedicated resource, it will be difficult for the UK to convince its Commonwealth partners that it is serious about the rejuvenation of the organisation and that 'Global Britain' wants to play a leadership role within it, rather than simply increasing trade with its most attractive economies. The FCO should therefore consider the Commonwealth as a distinct priority in planning for the deployment of 250 additional UK-based staff and the opening of ten additional Posts.

29. In its response to this Report, the FCO should clarify how much money Her Majesty's Government currently spends on the Commonwealth, including the UK's subscription to the Commonwealth Secretariat, and the amounts the FCO and other government departments contribute to Commonwealth programmes and initiatives. The FCO should also tell us what assessments it has made of the resources that will be needed beyond 2020 to achieve the Government's long-term goal of rejuvenating the Commonwealth and what plans are in place to increase the resources it devotes to the Commonwealth and its member states.

The FCO recognises the Commonwealth as a priority for Global Britain, and is committing resource for the longer term to meet it. This is demonstrated by the Foreign Secretary's announcement during CHOGM that we will open nine new missions in Commonwealth countries, expanding the UK's diplomatic network from 38 to 47 Commonwealth members.

The UK remains the largest financial contributor to the Commonwealth, and we have made significant commitments to the Commonwealth for the coming years. At CHOGM, Leaders committed to strengthening the Secretariat including through sustainable finance. However, the rejuvenation of the Commonwealth in the long term is not simply a

matter of increasing financial resources. Key will be effective performance, efficiency and reform of the Commonwealth Secretariat. Future funding plans for the Commonwealth Secretariat post-2020 will depend on progress in these areas.

The FCO currently makes assessed contributions of £5.48m pa to the Commonwealth Secretariat, and £0.7m pa to the Commonwealth Foundation. DFID currently provides up to £33.1m over three Commonwealth financial years (2016/17 to 2018/19) to the three intergovernmental organisations of the Commonwealth: up to £8m pa to the Commonwealth Fund for Technical Cooperation, £1.03m pa to the Commonwealth Youth Programme, £0.3m pa to the Commonwealth Foundation, and £1.3m pa to the Commonwealth of Learning. These funds will, from this financial year, all fall under the auspices of the FCO rather than joint FCO/DFID auspices. The FCO will therefore take budgetary control, but will continue to consult Whitehall Departments to ensure value for money is being achieved.

At a pan-Commonwealth level, DFID further provides:

- £50 million of matched funding to the Queen Elizabeth Diamond Jubilee Trust, as part of a 5-year (2014–2019) commitment to support the Trust's avoidable blindness programmes (trachoma, diabetic retinopathy and retinopathy of prematurity).
- £3.9 million over three years (2017/18 to 2019/20) to the Commonwealth Local Government Forum (CLGF), to work with, and build the capacity of, local government organisations to design, develop and implement Local Economic Development (LED) strategies.
- £26.44 million in 2018/19 to the Commonwealth Scholarship Commission. The CSC is the DFID Non-Departmental Public Body (NDPB) responsible for administering the UK contribution to the Commonwealth Scholarship and Fellowship Plan (CSFP).

During CHOGM, the UK announced a range of programmes for the UK's Chair-in-Office period. These include:

- £212 million for Commonwealth countries through the Girls Education Challenge.
- £61.4 million of programme support to address marine plastics, and a further £9m for the Commonwealth Marine Economies programme.
- £44 million to help Commonwealth countries prepare for the impact of natural disasters.
- A £7 million partnership with the International Trade Centre (SheTrades Commonwealth) to increase economic growth and job creation in Commonwealth countries by enabling the increased participation of women-owned business in trade.
- £5 million to the expansion of the Association of Commonwealth Universities' scholarship endowment fund, renamed as the Queen Elizabeth Commonwealth Scholarships.

- Up to £16 million to help Commonwealth countries strengthen their cyber security.
- £7.5 million to support Commonwealth countries to tackle child labour and online sexual exploitation.
- Up to £3 million to support human rights capacity, through the Commonwealth Forum of National Human Rights Institutions, the Commonwealth Small States Office in Geneva, and the Secretariat of the Pacific Community.

Commonwealth developing countries benefit substantially from Official Development Assistance. Many of DFID's largest bilateral programmes are with Commonwealth countries. Eight of the top 20 country recipients of bilateral UK ODA in 2016 were Commonwealth countries: Pakistan, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Tanzania, Bangladesh, Kenya, Uganda and Malawi. Total bilateral UK ODA to Commonwealth countries in 2016 (latest figures available) was £1.99 billion.