



House of Commons  
Foreign Affairs Committee

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# Global Britain and the 2018 Commonwealth Summit

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Seventh Report of Session 2017–19





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**Seventh Report of Session 2017–19**

*Report, together with formal minutes  
relating to the report*

*Ordered by the House of Commons  
to be printed 27 March 2018*

## 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.

### Current membership

[Tom Tugendhat MP](#) (*Conservative, Tonbridge and Malling*) (Chair)

[Ian Austin MP](#) (*Labour, Dudley North*)

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The following Members were also members of the Committee during the Parliament:

Ms Nusrat Ghani MP and Nadhim Zahawi MP.

### Powers

The Committee is one of the departmental select committees, the powers of which are set out in House of Commons Standing Orders, principally in SO No 152. These are available on the internet via [www.parliament.uk](http://www.parliament.uk).

### Publication

Committee reports are published on the Committee's website at [www.parliament.uk/facom](http://www.parliament.uk/facom) and in print by Order of the House.

Evidence relating to this report is published on the [inquiry page](#) of the Committee's website.

### Committee staff

The current staff of the Committee are Tom Goldsmith (Clerk), Zoe Oliver-Watts (Second Clerk), Hannah Bryce (Clerk), Dr Ariella Huff (Senior Committee Specialist), Ashlee Godwin, Dr Eoin Martin and Nicholas Wade (Committee Specialists), Clare Genis (Senior Committee Assistant), Alyna Poremba and Zara Wootton (Committee Assistants) and Estelle Currie (Media Officer).

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## Summary

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The Commonwealth Summit takes place in London between 16 and 20 April. It will be the first time in more than 20 years that the UK has hosted this biennial gathering of the Commonwealth Heads of Government. This is a once-in-a-generation event.

The Summit should be the start of a process rather than an end in itself. During the Summit, the UK will assume the Commonwealth Chair-in-Office until 2020. It is imperative that it begins with clear aims for what the UK wants to achieve by the end of its tenure in 2020, with a credible strategy, specific objectives and metrics for success.

The FCO should also produce a statement of the Government's long-term vision for the UK's relationship with the Commonwealth, and clarify what the 52 other members can expect from a 'Global Britain'. It should set out how it will lead the cross-Government relationship with the Commonwealth and how the work of other Departments will feed into this strategy. The FCO should also explain what it will do to build a Commonwealth caucus in the UN, and what assessments it has made of the resources that will be needed beyond 2020 to achieve the Government's stated goal of rejuvenating the Commonwealth.





# Introduction: An overview of the Commonwealth Summit

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1. The Commonwealth Summit (the Summit) is a biennial gathering of the Commonwealth Heads of Government. Malta hosted the 24th Summit in 2015 and Vanuatu was due to host the 25th in 2017, but was unable to do so after its infrastructure was devastated by Cyclone Pam. The Commonwealth Heads of Government therefore agreed in November 2015 that the UK should host the Summit instead, and it will take place between 16 and 20 April. The centrepiece will be the meeting of the Heads of Government in London, followed by a leaders' retreat at Windsor Castle and events to celebrate Her Majesty the Queen's leadership of the Commonwealth since 1952.

2. This will be the first time since 1997 that the UK has hosted the Summit and the Government has said that it will be one of the biggest ever hosted in the UK. In light of the once-in-a-generation significance of the event, we took evidence on 20 February from the FCO's Minister of State for the Commonwealth, Lord Ahmad, and the UK's Commonwealth Envoy, Richard Oppenheim, and Tim Hitchens, the Summit's Chief Executive, who are based in the Cabinet Office. As well as taking evidence on the Summit itself, we have used it as an opportunity to take evidence on the Government's vision for the UK's tenure as Commonwealth Chair-in-Office between 2018 and 2020 and the Government's stated plans to rejuvenate the organisation as a whole.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The role of the Chair-in-Office is to voice Commonwealth positions at high-level international forums. In practice, it is akin to a rotating presidency of the organisation.

# 1 The FCO's strategic vision for the Summit and the UK's tenure as Chair

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## The Summit and its goals

3. In November 2017, the Foreign Secretary told the House that the Summit would “be one of the biggest summits that the UK has ever hosted” and that “we want a great celebration for the Commonwealth that is underpinned by real substance”. He also spoke about some of the main topics that would be discussed: young people, and girls’ education in particular; the legacy of human rights abuses in Sri Lanka; and Zimbabwe’s possible readmission to the Commonwealth. He added that “free trade deals and the prospect of increased trade with our Commonwealth friends and partners” would be “at the heart of the Summit”.<sup>2</sup>

4. The Foreign Secretary further elaborated on his vision for the Summit in an article published in *The Sunday Express* on 12 March 2018. In it, he said: “I hope this will be a uniquely memorable gathering, showing just how much importance Britain attaches to the Commonwealth”. He also said that key themes of the Summit would be “how to boost trade within the Commonwealth”, improving security co-operation, taking joint action to protect the world’s oceans, and ensuring 12 years of quality education and learning for children across the Commonwealth. This range of topics was, the Foreign Secretary said, “yet more proof of the value of the Commonwealth”.<sup>3</sup> The Foreign Secretary also spoke about these themes when he appeared before us on 21 March.<sup>4</sup>

5. When Lord Ahmad appeared before us, we asked him how the Government would judge the success of the Summit. He said that every Commonwealth Head of Government was expected to attend and that this in itself would be one of the metrics of its success. Beyond this, he stressed that the agenda of the Summit and the decisions taken during it would be based on consensus among the 53 Heads of Government and that, as host, the UK was not in a position to dictate either. But he said that the Prime Minister was “very keen that we see specific progress on the issues that matter to people across the Commonwealth: trade, education, security and indeed climate change”, and that the Government hoped that discussions around trade deals could begin at the Summit, even if they could not be signed.<sup>5</sup>

## The goals of the UK's tenure as Chair-in-Office

6. Lord Ahmad told us that the “youth agenda” would be a particular priority during the UK’s two-year tenure as Chair-in-Office of the Commonwealth and that “we want to get a broad commitment on 12 years of quality education, particularly for young women and girls”.<sup>6</sup> On the same day, he told the House of Lords that the Government’s priorities as Chair would “reflect what will be decided during the course of the Heads of Government meeting itself”, but that issues such as trade, empowerment and education, cyber-crime

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2 HC Deb 21 November 2017, [col 836](#)

3 Foreign Secretary’s article in [The Sunday Express](#), 12 March 2018

4 [Oral evidence taken on 21 March 2018](#), HC (2017–19) 538, Q280

5 Q5, Q15

6 Q1

and climate change were likely to be reflected in the two-year agenda. He did not, however, specify what the UK aimed to achieve as Chair-in-Office and what metrics would be used to judge success in 2020.<sup>7</sup>

**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.***

***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.***

## 2 The FCO's Commonwealth policy

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### Rejuvenating the Commonwealth

10. When Lord Hague became Foreign Secretary in 2010, he pledged to “put the ‘C’ back into FCO” and later vowed to place the organisation “back at the very heart of British foreign policy”.<sup>8</sup> When Lord Ahmad appeared before us in February, we asked him if this had actually happened. He agreed that the Commonwealth had been neglected by Government and that there had been “other priorities”. He subsequently added: “I believe we have under-leveraged our relationship. We have not availed ourselves of the opportunities that the Commonwealth offers”.<sup>9</sup> On the same day, the Minister of State told the House of Lords: “The Commonwealth is desperately underleveraged in terms of what it brings together in common languages, common history, common cultures and common opportunities for the future”.<sup>10</sup> Similarly, when the Foreign Secretary appeared before us on 21 March, he said that the Commonwealth had been “undervalued by this country—not by other Commonwealth members—over the past 50 years”.<sup>11</sup>

11. Lord Ahmad and the Foreign Secretary have both stressed on several occasions that one of the clearest goals of the Summit for the UK is to boost intra-Commonwealth trade, along with a number of other specific priorities, such as gender equality and girls’ education, the resilience of small island states and ocean sustainability. The Government has also made clear, however, that beyond this, one of the goals of ‘Global Britain’ after the Summit is the long-term rejuvenation of the Commonwealth. For example, in a statement on Commonwealth Day 2017, the Prime Minister said that the UK had a long-standing commitment to the Commonwealth values of democracy, human rights and the rule of law and that,

In hosting the Commonwealth Summit next year, the UK is committed to working with all members not only to reaffirm these shared values, but also to re-energise and revitalise the Commonwealth to cement its relevance to this and future generations. As we look to create a truly global Britain, the deep partnerships that we share through a 21st century Commonwealth can help us strengthen the prosperity and security of our own citizens, and those of our many friends and allies across the world.<sup>12</sup>

12. In September 2017, the Prime Minister hosted a reception for Commonwealth leaders at the UN General Assembly, at which she said that the aim of the Summit could be encapsulated as “towards a common future”. She added:

So I hope that we can come together as a Commonwealth family and seize the opportunity to drive forward the necessary reforms. The prize, if we succeed in this collaborative effort will be a rejuvenated Commonwealth,

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8 William Hague, speeches on [6 October 2010](#) and [27 July 2011](#)

9 Q8, Q16

10 HL Deb 20 February 2018, [col 9](#)

11 [Oral evidence taken on 21 March 2018](#), HC (2017–19) 538, Q280

12 The Prime Minister’s [Commonwealth Day statement](#), 13 March 2017

better able to answer the aspirations of its citizens, especially its young citizens. Malta started this important process in Valletta [in 2015]. The UK is determined to help carry forward that agenda for the long term.<sup>13</sup>

This objective was summed up by Tim Hitchens in January 2018, when he told the House of Lords International Relations Committee that the UK's aim was to rejuvenate the Commonwealth so that it “takes its place once more as one of the significant international organisations”.<sup>14</sup> Similarly, in a Westminster Hall debate on the future of the Commonwealth on 21 March, the FCO Minister of State for the Middle East said that the Government's ambition was to use the Summit “to reinvigorate the Commonwealth and to help make it an even more active and influential global network”. He added that the Government wanted the Summit to be “an important milestone for the Commonwealth—a point in its history where it shows it is fit and able to take on the challenges of the 21st century”.<sup>15</sup>

13. When we asked Lord Ahmad what message about ‘Global Britain’ the Government intended to project at the Summit, he said: “That we have a common future, that we are building on the issues that matter and that this is an opportunity to strengthen our trade ties.”<sup>16</sup> He also told us that one of his objectives was to “to ensure we give this the priority it deserves in terms of the opportunities it offers”, and that it was his intention that “the momentum that we have built to date should continue after the Summit”.<sup>17</sup> Similarly, in Westminster Hall on 21 March, the FCO Minister for the Middle East said that ‘Global Britain’ is “fine as a slogan” but that “we have to deliver” and that the Commonwealth provided “an opportunity, in conjunction with other work that we will do, to do just that”. He added that the Summit was “a priority for the Government”.<sup>18</sup>

14. In a blogpost on 12 March 2018, the FCO Permanent Secretary said that the Summit would be “proof of our continuing engagement in multilateral diplomacy and of our convening power”. He added that the Commonwealth would “acquire even greater significance for the UK” as it prepares to leave the EU.<sup>19</sup> However, when he appeared before us in November 2017, Sir Simon said that the Commonwealth was not a top priority for the FCO, and that it “is a very important organisation to the United Kingdom, but not as important, in the next period, as the neighbourhood, China or the United States”.<sup>20</sup> Similarly, the memorandum that the FCO supplied to the Committee on ‘Global Britain’ in March 2018 prioritised the United States, Europe and the Indo-Pacific but mentioned the Commonwealth only in two paragraphs towards the end.<sup>21</sup> When the Foreign Secretary appeared before us on 21 March 2018 he reiterated that the FCO's priority in the allocation of resources would be the US, Europe and the Asia-Pacific.<sup>22</sup>

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13 The Prime Minister's [speech at Commonwealth leaders reception](#), 20 September 2017

14 House of Lords Select Committee on International Relations, Report: [Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting 2018](#), p. 2, para 8.

15 HC Deb 21 March 2018, [col 187WH](#)

16 Q9

17 Q8, Q21

18 HC Deb 21 March 2018, [col 187WH](#)

19 Sir Simon McDonald, [blogpost on CHOGM](#), 12 March 2018

20 [Oral evidence taken on 15 November 2017](#), HC (2017–19) 573, Q18

21 Foreign Affairs Committee: [Global Britain](#), 6 March 2018, paras 46, 47

22 [Oral evidence taken on 21 March 2018](#), HC (2017–19) 538, Q288

## The Commonwealth as a network

15. Lord Ahmad told us that the Commonwealth is not like the EU or the UN, and that its biggest advantage “is that it is a network”. He went on to suggest that this network of 53 states works in a range of ways. On some issues, individual Commonwealth members come together on a bilateral basis; on other issues, groups of members come together. The biennial summit is the moment when all 53 come together and agree collective action. Lord Ahmad said:

There will be occasions within the context of the Commonwealth where two countries move together, be it on trade, education or development. There will be other times when a collection of countries move together on a particular agenda; when it comes to the issues of the Summit and the CHOGM, the 53 nations have to agree on a common agenda. That is the strength of the Commonwealth.<sup>23</sup>

16. Lord Ahmad emphasised the complexity of a Commonwealth that is underpinned by overlapping bilateral and multilateral relationships rather than the inter-governmental structures that govern the EU or the UN. He did not, however, say how the Government planned to manage this complexity to harness the collective potential of the organisation. Furthermore, while he told us that the Commonwealth “provides greater opportunities, on occasion, to do more bilaterally”, he did not say what it was about common membership of the organisation that set such bilateral relationships apart from others or what messages around this a ‘Global Britain’ would be able to convey if the FCO admitted that the Commonwealth was not a top priority.<sup>24</sup> This apparent inconsistency was further evidenced when Harriet Baldwin, the FCO Minister of State for Africa—where there are 19 Commonwealth members—told us that she did not have “any hand in drafting” the FCO’s ‘Global Britain’ memorandum to us and “would have wanted to see a higher mention in terms of the work that I do”.<sup>25</sup>

## The FCO’s role in managing relations with the Commonwealth

17. When we asked Lord Ahmad if the ‘C’ had been put back in FCO, he told us that “as the Minister who carries the ‘C’ not only in the broader title but in his specific title as well”, much of his work in recent months was around “energising my teams and the officials around me within the context of the Foreign Office to ensure we give this the priority it deserves in terms of the opportunities it offers”. However, he said that the best answer was the fact that the Prime Minister was personally overseeing preparations for the Summit and that she was supported in this by an inter-ministerial group chaired by the Foreign Secretary and the Home Secretary, which drew in the Secretaries of State for International Development, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.<sup>26</sup>

## The Commonwealth’s values

18. The Commonwealth states that it is united by the values of human rights, democracy and the rule of law. We asked Lord Ahmad what the Commonwealth values amounted to

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23 Q24

24 Q38

25 [Oral evidence taken on 13 March 2018](#), HC (2017–19) 900, Q74

26 Q8

if homosexual activity is criminalised in 36 of the 53 Commonwealth countries and the death penalty is imposed in 20. He said that the UK did not believe these practices were in accordance with the values of the Commonwealth, that the UK was a strong advocate for same-sex rights and the repeal of the death penalty and that both issues were likely to be raised at the Summit. He also said that the Commonwealth was a network that allowed the UK to raise these issues bilaterally and collectively.<sup>27</sup> In response to an oral Parliamentary question in the House of Lords on 21 March about the UK Government's human rights priorities for the communiqué of the Commonwealth Summit in April 2018, Lord Ahmad also stated that: "Declarations from the Commonwealth are always strong but the actions have perhaps not delivered on those declarations. Together, working with the Secretary-General, it is our aim to revitalise and re-energise the Commonwealth." He emphasised that the Government's approach on human rights, including in connection with the Commonwealth, "has never been one of pointing fingers" but was "about learning from experience".<sup>28</sup>

## The Commonwealth in the UN

19. When Lord Ahmad appeared before us on 7 February 2018 in his capacity as Minister of State for the UN, he told us that the UK would "need to strengthen [its] role to see how we can work more cohesively and with strength with some of our Commonwealth partners" in the UN.<sup>29</sup> We also asked him if the UK should pay less attention to the Security Council and more to the General Assembly. He said: "I am keen to explore and strengthen the position we have within the context of the Commonwealth".<sup>30</sup> When we questioned how the UK could build a Commonwealth caucus in the UN, given the diversity of its members, he said:

There is a lot of strength. I am very passionate about the Commonwealth, because, taking a step back, if you have common systems, common languages, common legal systems and educational frameworks, that is a very strong base for continued working and strengthened working. I think the Commonwealth is desperately underleveraged.<sup>31</sup>

The Minister subsequently told us in a letter dated 9 March that the Summit was an opportunity to support the smallest and most vulnerable Commonwealth countries to access the international rules-based order. He also said that, since the 2015 Summit, the UK had provided £400,000 in funding for the Commonwealth Small States Office, which supports the work of some of the smallest Commonwealth countries at UN institutions in both New York and Geneva.<sup>32</sup>

**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**

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27 Q82

28 HL Deb 21 March 2018, [col 310](#)

29 [Oral evidence taken on 7 February 2018](#), HC (2017–19) 675, Q50

30 [Oral evidence taken on 7 February 2018](#), HC (2017–19) 675, Q82

31 [Oral evidence taken on 7 February 2018](#), HC (2017–19) 675, Q98

32 [Letter from Lord Ahmad to the Committee](#), 9 March 2018



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.*

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.*

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.*



## 3 FCO resources dedicated to the Commonwealth

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### The management of the Summit

23. In March 2017, the Prime Minister said that she would oversee preparations to ensure that the Summit was a cross-government effort, including through a new, dedicated inter-ministerial group co-chaired by the Foreign-Secretary and the Home Secretary. Within the Civil Service, the Summit is being managed by former UK Ambassador to Japan Tim Hitchens, who was appointed the Summit’s Chief Executive in January 2017 and leads a team of 80 civil servants reporting directly to the Prime Minister. Mr Hitchens told us about this team when he appeared before us:

In my team, I have about 80 people. Of those, I would say that a team of about eight people are working on values. About half of the 80 are on the logistics side and the preparation for the summit—hotels and what have you. Of the other half, we divide ourselves broadly into the [four themes of the Summit]: security, fairness, trade and climate change.<sup>33</sup>

### The FCO’s Commonwealth-specific resources after the Summit

24. Lord Ahmad, Tim Hitchens and Richard Oppenheim told us that the 80-strong Summit unit is based in the Cabinet Office but that it is envisaged it will move to the FCO after the event. It was not clear, however, how many of the roughly 40 civil servants that are working on the non-logistical elements of the Summit will be kept in place for the UK’s tenure as Chair-in-Office and if any will be retained by the FCO after this tenure ends in 2020. Tim Hitchens said: “We clearly will have a reinforced team looking after the Commonwealth for certainly the next two years of the Chair-in-Office period”. He added he was confident that “we will have a reinforced team in place” beyond that.<sup>34</sup> Lord Ahmad said: “It is certainly our intention from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office that after the summit, for the two years as Chair-in-Office, we will not suddenly let everyone go”.<sup>35</sup>

25. Richard Oppenheim said that the FCO was making a number of bids to the Treasury that would allow it to retain some of those recruited or redeployed for the Summit from elsewhere in the Civil Service. Lord Ahmad said that “the intention is to retain and sustain the experience and expertise that we have built up from other Departments”.<sup>36</sup> He added that “there is a lot of momentum that has been built up and a lot of expertise, and we do not want to lose that” but that this uplift would not come at the expense of other areas. He said:

This isn’t about trade-offs. This is about ensuring that we continue with the momentum we’ve built up to the summit, and that for our two years in

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33 Q83  
34 Q19  
35 Q19  
36 Q27

office—as Chair—we also have the resources available to us at the Foreign Office, to be able to deliver as Chair-in-Office, in terms of our role and in terms of the resources.<sup>37</sup>

26. Mr Oppenheim also told us that it was envisaged that the inter-ministerial group coordinating cross-Government planning for the Summit would be kept in place for the UK’s tenure as Chair-in-Office. This has been supported by a steering board of senior officials from across Government and it was expected that this too would continue after the Summit.<sup>38</sup> Again, however, there was no suggestion that this resource would remain beyond 2020.

27. When the Foreign Secretary appeared before us on 21 March 2018, he told us that the FCO had secured funds from HM Treasury that would allow it to deploy an additional 250 UK-based staff overseas and to open ten additional overseas Posts.<sup>39</sup> He spoke about this in terms of the ‘Global Britain’ campaign:

The job of the Global Britain campaign is to show to our friends and partners that our decision on the European Union can be and is being accompanied by an intensified engagement with the world, not just in the EU, where we are adding 50 diplomats, but around the world where, as I just told the Committee, we are adding another 250 diplomats.<sup>40</sup>

Sir Simon McDonald told us, however, that Ministers had not yet decided where these additional staff would be deployed, while the Foreign Secretary said that the priorities would be “the Americas and North America, the European region and Asia-Pacific”.<sup>41</sup>

**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<sup>42</sup> 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***

37 Q30, Q32

38 Q19

39 [Oral evidence taken on 21 March 2018](#), HC (2017–19) 538, Q259

40 [Oral evidence taken on 21 March 2018](#), HC (2017–19) 538, Q283

41 [Oral evidence taken on 21 March 2018](#), HC (2017–19) 538, Q284 [Sir Simon McDonald], Q288 [Foreign Secretary]

42 UK-based staff are staff employed by the FCO in the UK and deployed overseas. In contrast, locally-engaged staff are recruited directly by UK Posts.

*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.*

## Conclusions and recommendations

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### The FCO's strategic vision for the Summit and the UK's tenure as Chair

1. 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. (Paragraph 7)
2. *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. (Paragraph 8)*
3. *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. (Paragraph 9)*

### The FCO's Commonwealth policy

4. 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. (Paragraph 20)*
5. *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. (Paragraph 21)*

6. *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. (Paragraph 22)*

### FCO resources dedicated to the Commonwealth

7. 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. (Paragraph 28)
8. *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. (Paragraph 29)*

## Formal minutes

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**Tuesday 27 March 2018**

Members present:

Tom Tugendhat, in the Chair

Ian Austin	Ian Murray
Chris Bryant	Priti Patel
Ann Clwyd	Andrew Rosindell
Mike Gapes	Mr Bob Seely
Stephen Gethins	Royston Smith

Draft Report (*Global Britain and the 2018 Commonwealth Summit*), proposed by the Chair, brought up and read.

*Ordered*, That the draft Report be read a second time, paragraph by paragraph.

Paragraphs 1 to 29 read and agreed to.

Summary agreed to.

*Resolved*, That the Report be the Seventh Report of the Committee to the House.

*Ordered*, That the Chair make the Report to the House.

*Ordered*, That embargoed copies of the Report be made available, in accordance with the provisions of Standing Order No. 134.

[Adjourned till tomorrow at 2.15pm]

## Witnesses

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The following witnesses gave evidence. Transcripts can be viewed on the [inquiry publications page](#) of the Committee's website.

### Tuesday 20 February 2018

*Question number*

**Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon**, Minister of State for the Commonwealth and the UN, Foreign and Commonwealth Office; **Tim Hitchens**, Chief Executive of the Commonwealth Summit, Cabinet Office; and **Richard Oppenheim**, UK Commonwealth Envoy

[Q1-96](#)

## Published written evidence

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The following written evidence was received and can be viewed on the [inquiry publications page](#) of the Committee's website.

COM numbers are generated by the evidence processing system and so may not be complete.

- 1 Foreign and Commonwealth Office ([COM0001](#))

## List of Reports from the Committee during the current Parliament

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All publications from the Committee are available on the [publications page](#) of the Committee's website. The reference number of the Government's response to each Report is printed in brackets after the HC printing number.

### Session 2017–19

First Report	Violence in Rakhine State and the UK's response	HC 435
Second Report	The future of UK diplomacy in Europe	HC 514
Third Report	Kurdish aspirations and the interests of the UK	HC 518
Fourth Report	2017 elections to the International Court of Justice	HC 860
Fifth Report	The UK's response to hurricanes in its Overseas Territories	HC 722
Sixth Report	Global Britain	HC 780
First Special Report	The United Kingdom's relations with Russia: Government Response	HC 332
Second Special Report	The UK's relations with Turkey: Government Response	HC 333
Third Special Report	'Political Islam', and the Muslim Brotherhood Review: Government Response	HC 334
Fourth Special Report	Violence in Rakhine State and the UK's response: Government Response	HC 868
Fifth Special Report	The future of UK diplomacy in Europe: Government Response	HC 918