



ROYAL COMMONWEALTH SOCIETY

Chair Recruitment Candidate Information Pack

April 2025





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Welcome from the Chair

Thank you for your interest in the position of Chair of the Royal Commonwealth Society.

The Royal Commonwealth Society (RCS) is a charity founded in 1868. Our aim is to promote the values of the Commonwealth through the work of civil society in four areas of work that are supportive of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

This is an exciting time for the RCS. We have three programmes that are contributing to the SDGs, notably SDG 4 (quality education) through The Queen's Commonwealth Essay Competition, SDG 14 (life beneath water) in partnership with Commonwealth Sport, and SDG 5 (gender equality) through the Commonwealth Youth and Gender Equality Network (CYGEN). We are also the convenors of annual events that promote the Commonwealth, namely, the Commonwealth Day Service of Celebration and the High Commissioners' Banquet.

We are looking for a new Chair who is enthused by our vision and wants to use their expertise to help us achieve our charitable aims.

If you are interested in chairing this special organisation, we would very much look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely,

Dr Linda Yueh CBE
Executive Chair, Royal Commonwealth Society

www.royalcwsociety.org



About The Royal Commonwealth Society

Founded in 1868, the Royal Commonwealth Society (RCS) is the oldest charity dedicated to the Commonwealth. The RCS is a network of organisations and individuals across more than 70 countries in the Commonwealth and beyond who promote the value and the values of the Commonwealth.

His Majesty The King is the Patron of the Royal Commonwealth Society, and Her Majesty The Queen is the Vice-Patron.

The King succeeded The late Queen Elizabeth II, who had been Patron since 1952 when she was also Head of the Commonwealth. Queen Camilla had previously been our inaugural Vice-Patron since 2018.

The Honorary Vice-President is the Secretary-General of the Commonwealth.

The Royal Commonwealth Society is governed by an experienced Council comprising the Chair and Trustees.

The offices are in Guildhall, London, with team members based in Canada, Malta, Nigeria, the Solomon Islands, South Africa, and Sri Lanka.

In addition to branches, the Royal Commonwealth Society has an active network of over 450 Associate Fellows. Formerly Queen's Young Leaders and other outstanding young people from all 56 Commonwealth countries, the Associate Fellows are re-appointed annually based on their contributions to their respective Working Groups.

The RCS enjoys the support of a number of Ambassadors, including singer and children's book author Geri Halliwell-Horner, singer Alexandra Burke, writer and broadcaster Gyles Brandreth, children's author David Walliams, actress Ayesha Dharker, and heavyweight boxer Anthony Joshua.



What we do

Our unique position within the Commonwealth family allows us to play a pivotal role in convening and connecting the Commonwealth's political and diplomatic representatives, civil society, business, and youth leaders on a wide range of issues, as well as to deliver highlights of the Commonwealth calendar such as the annual Commonwealth Day Service of Celebration at Westminster Abbey and the High Commissioners' Banquet at Mansion House.

Through youth empowerment, education, and high-level advocacy, the Society promotes the importance of communities, literacy, the environment, and equality.

Four pillars of our work

The Royal Commonwealth Society's Strategic Plan 2020-2025 has four strands: connecting communities, championing literacy, protecting the environment, and promoting equality.

Connecting communities

In this divided world, there has never been a greater need for the Commonwealth's values. Through high-profile, annual events, including the Commonwealth Day Service of Celebration at Westminster Abbey and the High Commissioners' Banquet at Mansion House, the Royal Commonwealth Society, brings together communities to reinforce the power of connected communities to build a better world.

The Commonwealth Day Service provides an opportunity to focus attention on this voluntary association of 56 countries and its commitment to promoting democracy, human rights, the rule of law, and equality for its 2.6 billion citizens.

Broadcast on the BBC in the UK and globally, the Service showcases the Commonwealth's diversity and strengths to millions of viewers. It fosters a greater understanding of its achievements and role, particularly among young people, including the over 700 schoolchildren who are in the congregation.

The High Commissioners' Banquet serves as another annual opportunity to bring together the Commonwealth's London-based diplomatic representatives, Commonwealth community, and business leaders to raise the Commonwealth's profile and address the challenges facing its member states. Established in 1874 and thus recently celebrating 150 years of this annual highlight of the Commonwealth diplomatic calendar, the Society has held the High Commissioners' Banquet at various venues, including St James's Palace.

These, and other events in Parliament, connect diplomats with young leaders and community champions to foster the people-to-people links that make the Commonwealth special.

Championing literacy

The Queen's Commonwealth Essay Competition is the world's oldest international writing competition for schools, which has been proudly delivered by the Royal Commonwealth Society since 1883.

Each year, the theme is drawn from Commonwealth values and principles. It encourages young people to engage with the pressing global issues of the day, such as the environment, equality, and youth leadership, to foster an open-minded and empathetic worldview.

The week normally culminates with an Award Ceremony at Buckingham Palace. Her Majesty The Queen often refers to The Queen's Commonwealth Essay Competition in her overseas visits, where she meets entrants and presents local winners with their certificates.

In 2023, to celebrate its 140th anniversary, the RCS launched a companion initiative, Write Around the World. In partnership with the Royal Society of Literature (RSL), this digital literacy programme features RSL Fellows who deliver modules teaching young writers techniques to produce an essay or poem, amongst other written skills. At the end of the six-week programme, the participants are encouraged to submit an entry to The Queen's Commonwealth Essay Competition.

Write Around the World will extend the reach of The Queen's Commonwealth Essay Competition to less advantaged, remote, and rural communities across the Commonwealth.

By focusing on developing writing skills, this literacy programme aims to help Commonwealth nations deliver the UN Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4: Quality Education.

Protecting the environment

The Royal Commonwealth Society delivered the first environmental initiative in Queen Elizabeth II's name, The Queen's Commonwealth Canopy (QCC), between 2015 and 2022. Launched at the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) in Malta, which was Queen Elizabeth's last overseas trip to a Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting, The Queen's Commonwealth Canopy, achieved pan-Commonwealth commitment in 2022. It was announced by His Majesty The King as HRH The Prince of Wales at the Rwanda CHOGM. The Queen's Commonwealth Canopy has seen every Commonwealth country dedicate significant tracts of land. From the dense tropical forests of Barbados to the native pine forests of Cyprus, The Queen's Commonwealth Canopy conserves almost 12 million hectares of indigenous forests.

Having achieved a significant pan-Commonwealth initiative, the Royal Commonwealth Society launched at the Samoa Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting another pan-Commonwealth environmental project, the Commonwealth Clean Oceans Plastics Campaign, delivered in partnership with the Commonwealth Games Federation.

According to the United Nations, 'plastic is the most harmful type of ocean pollution', and the Commonwealth is disproportionately affected because nearly half of its members are Small Island Developing States (25 out of 56 countries).

To support UN SDG 14 (Life Below Water), this campaign will be featured in The King's Baton Relay that will travel to every Commonwealth country and overseas territory until the Glasgow Games in the summer of 2026.

The aim is to prevent one million pieces of plastic from entering the Commonwealth's waterways by mobilising the Associate Fellow Network, Commonwealth Games athletes, other volunteers and by working with local partners to change behaviour through an ongoing educational campaign.

Promoting equality

As Secretariat to the Commonwealth Youth Gender and Equality Network (CYGEN), the Royal Commonwealth Society supports the meaningful inclusion of youth voices on gender equality issues in local, national, regional, Commonwealth and international agendas. With the support of the Australian Government, the Commonwealth Youth Gender and Equality Network was launched by the RCS a decade ago ahead of the Malta Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting and has become a UN-recognised youth voice for gender equality in the Commonwealth.

CYGEN, which comprises over 220 members from all five regions of the Commonwealth, is currently mandated by its members to deliver its Gender Agenda, which identified the following five priority pillars of work:

1. Early child and forced marriage
2. Sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, and sex characteristics (SOGIESC+)
3. Gender and governance
4. Sexual and reproductive health and rights
5. Youth transitions (e.g. education, training and employment)

The Royal Commonwealth Society has supported CYGEN through numerous grants obtained from the Australian and Canadian governments. It has enabled the Commonwealth Youth Gender and Equality Network to hold side events and participate in the Youth Forums at every Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting over the past decade. The RCS has also organised forums for the Commonwealth Youth Gender and Equality Network to meet with policymakers, including the presidents of Malta and Seychelles, as well as Commonwealth parliamentarians, to share their expertise and experience at the grassroots level. This work contributes to UN SDG 5 on gender equality.



How we're funded

The Society is non-partisan, independent of governments and relies on public generosity to achieve its mission.

In addition to individual donations and legacies, the RCS is funded through three different means:

Friends programme – Regular donors who make monthly or annual donations that provide core funding. Friends are invited to high-profile and exclusive events organised by the RCS.

Sponsorship – The Queen's Commonwealth Essay Competition sponsorship funds cover the delivery of the competition, including Winners' Week, when the RCS brings the winners and their families to the UK.

Fundraising events – The Commonwealth Banquet has been the RCS's annual fundraising event held during Commonwealth Week every March. The black-tie gala features live music, entertainment, a charity auction, and brings together members of the Commonwealth community for an evening of celebration.

Council

The RCS is governed by a Council, which forms the board of trustees, chaired by Dr Linda Yueh CBE. Each member of Council serves up to two four-year terms.

Council meets four times each year in central London and reasonable travel expenses within the UK are reimbursed.



What we are looking for

To get the most out of being on the RCS's Council, we are looking for those who have a passion for our aims and can commit to the time and effort required. Our trustees need strategic vision, independent judgement, and an ability to work effectively and actively as part of a small but dedicated charitable organisation. We are seeking an experienced Chair who can lead the Council in a collegiate and effective manner to deliver the most impact for the citizens of the Commonwealth.

To fulfil the duties of this role, we are looking for someone who has considerable board experience and a commitment to charitable endeavours. A background in the Commonwealth is not required. We are especially keen to hear from people from a wide range of backgrounds.

Role description

- Oversee the Council and the Society's strategy and direction
- Management of finances of the Society
- Lead fundraising efforts
- Responsible for the governance of the Society
- Maintain relationships with external stakeholders

Person specification

- Chair experience would be highly desirable
- Board experience would be required
- Trustee experience of charitable organisations would be desirable
- High-level professional experience
- Interest in the voluntary sector and its contribution to society
- Commitment to good governance
- Strong interpersonal skills and a collegiate approach
- An interest in global affairs and an international outlook
- Experience of working with stakeholders and doing so with professionalism and discretion
- Confidence in being the high profile representative of a significant institution

Terms and conditions

Salary

This is a volunteer role and there is no salary, Reasonable out-of-pocket expenses may be claimed on submission of appropriate documentation.

Terms of appointment

The initial term is four years. Council members are eligible for re-election at the expiry of that term, for one additional term.

Time commitment

The time commitment equates to one and a half days a month. There are four Council meetings a year and approximately 4-6 events.

How to apply

If you are passionate about joining the Royal Commonwealth Society and believe you have the skills and experience we are looking for, please apply with the following:

- An up-to-date 2 page CV
- A supporting statement of no more than 1 side of A4, detailing why you would like to be considered, your relevant experience and expertise and what you think you can bring to the role.
- 3 referees' contact emails and telephone numbers.

All applications are being handled by our recruitment partner, Trustees Unlimited (part of the Russam group).

All applications should be sent to applications@trustees-unlimited.co.uk with your full name and Royal Commonwealth Society Chair in the subject heading.

For an informal discussion about the role, please contact Melissa Baxter, Managing Partner - Charities on: melissa.baxter@trustees-unlimited.co.uk / 07789 985229.

Closing date for applications: Monday 5th May 2025

Interviews with Royal Commonwealth Society: Monday 19th May [online] and Tuesday 27th May 2025 [in person, at the Guildhall].

The role commences on 1st June 2025.

Please confirm the above dates are suitable in your covering letter. Please also highlight any potential conflicts of interest. References and other checks will be conducted.

