



## COMMONWEALTH CHAT DISCUSSION GUIDE

### 1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1. Explain that the Commonwealth Chat will take place for approximately 90 minutes
- 1.2. Explain that the Commonwealth Chat may be recorded (by tape/video/written notes as appropriate) to facilitate inclusion of the points raised in the Conversation recommendations. Make sure everyone has given their consent using a form at Appendix 1.
- 1.3. Explain that you are facilitating this Chat as part of a global project run by the Royal Commonwealth Society (an international charity) about public opinions about the Commonwealth and its future.
- 1.4. Explain that it does not matter whether participants think the Commonwealth is good, bad, or know nothing about it – all that matters is that they participate honestly.
- 1.5. Explain that you would like hear everyone's opinions so it is important that everyone is given the chance to speak.
- 1.6. Explain that there are a number of issues to get through in the allocated time, and that you may have to stop interesting discussions to get through all the topics.
- 1.7. Please note: the questions given below are ideas about the kind of discussions that you might like to have. This is simply a guide and you do not have to cover all of the topics, or ask all of the questions. Please feel free to adapt as you see fit!

### 2. WARM UP

Ask participants to introduce themselves: what are their names? Where are they from? What do they do for a living? What are their interests/hobbies? You could consider doing this as an ice-breaker: break your group into pairs, and get them to ask each other these questions, and then report back what their partner said to the whole group.

### 3. WHAT DO YOU THINK ABOUT THE COMMONWEALTH?

Objective: to gauge participants' levels of knowledge about the Commonwealth and explore their spontaneous opinions about the association. You should reassure participants that it does not matter if they don't know much about the Commonwealth, or aren't sure whether what they know is correct. We are just interested in their first impressions.

Suggested questions:

- If I say the word Commonwealth to you, what are the first things you think of?
- What does the Commonwealth do? What is it for?

- What are your overall impressions of the Commonwealth? Are you broadly in favour of it, or against it? Or neutral?
- What do you think is good/what do you like about the Commonwealth?
- And what do you think is not so good/ do not like?
- What have you heard about the Commonwealth, and how much? Where have you learnt about it (e.g. from friends, on TV, at school, through newspapers, online etc)

#### 4. COMMONWEALTH QUIZ

Objective: to break the ice, have some fun and to see how much people know about the Commonwealth

Ask participants to divide into two teams. Read out the 5 questions below. Each team writes down their answers, and you read the correct answers out at the end (answers are in brackets after the question below).

4.1 How many countries are in the Commonwealth?

- 19
- 38
- 45
- 53
- 89

[ANSWER = d]

4.2 How many people are there in Commonwealth countries?

- 500 million
- 1 billion
- 2 billion
- 5 billion

[ANSWER = c]

4.3 The Commonwealth Secretary-General, who leads the Commonwealth Secretariat, is currently Kamlesh Sharma. Which ONE of the following do you think is currently head of the Commonwealth overall?

- Nelson Mandela
- The Queen
- President Obama
- Kofi Annan
- Prince Charles

[ANSWER = b]

4.4 Name as many types of activity as you can undertaken by the Commonwealth

[ANSWERS include Commonwealth Games; promotion of democracy; Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM); human rights; cultural exchanges; economic development; education; good governance; scholarships; youth exchange; technical assistance;]

4.4 Which of the following countries do you think are currently Commonwealth members?

- a. The United States
- b. India
- c. South Africa
- d. Australia
- e. China
- f. Kenya
- g. Argentina
- h. The Irish Republic
- i. Cyprus
- j. Zimbabwe
- k. Jamaica
- l. Mozambique
- m. Nepal
- n. Don't know

[ANSWERS: b,c,d,f,i,k,l]

4.5 Where do you think the Commonwealth Secretariat (i.e. the Commonwealth's civil service) is based?

- a. Paris
- b. Nairobi
- c. New York
- d. London
- e. New Delhi
- f. Washington
- g. Geneva
- h. Cape Town
- i. Don't know

[ANSWER: d]

4.6 Where do you think the next Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM), taking place in November 2009, will be held?

- a. Vancouver, Canada
- b. London, UK
- c. Port of Spain, Trinidad and Tobago
- d. Sydney, Australia
- e. Kampala, Uganda
- f. New Delhi, India
- g. Don't know

[ANSWER: c]

## 5. FINDING OUT A BIT MORE ABOUT THE COMMONWEALTH

Objective: to gauge levels of knowledge about the Commonwealth and explore perceptions based on some basic information. To start with, please read out the notes at Appendix 2, and then hand around copies. Also print out and hand around the following map: <http://www.thecommonwealthconversation.org/wp-content/uploads/2009/07/The-Commonwealth.pdf>

Suggested questions:

- What are your first reactions to this information? Did this tell you anything new?
- Did anything surprise you? What? Why is that surprising?

## 6. THE COMMONWEALTH'S ROLE AND VALUE

Objective: to explore what participants think the role of the Commonwealth should be; what its priorities should be, and where they think it can be of most value on the world stage. To start with, please read out the notes at Appendix 3, and then hand around copies.

Suggested questions:

- What are your thoughts about the role of the Commonwealth? Does this surprise you? Why?
- Does this information fit with the first impressions you had of the Commonwealth?
- Bearing in mind what we have just read about the aims of the Commonwealth, on what global issues do you think the Commonwealth should be focussing its attention at the moment? Why?
- What do you think the Commonwealth could do to help address these issues? How do you think the Commonwealth should act e.g. on its own, in conjunction with other international organisations?
- Bearing in mind the information about the Commonwealth which we have just been looking at, what do you think are the Commonwealth's core strengths and main weaknesses?

## 7. THE BENEFITS OF MEMBERSHIP

Objective: to gauge how important participants feel the Commonwealth is, and what impact they feel it has, on them personally and on their country

Suggested questions:

- If your country left the Commonwealth, how would you feel? (happy, disappointed, wouldn't really mind one way or the other etc)
- How do you think your country would be affected if it left the Commonwealth?
- (If not covered) Do you think your country benefits from being part of the Commonwealth? How? / Why not?

## 8. FUTURE OF THE COMMONWEALTH

Objective: to gauge how participants view the future of the Commonwealth and its priorities for the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Suggested questions:

Imagine you were the Commonwealth Secretary-General.

- What would be the first thing that you would do (in terms of policy)? What would be your top priority?
- What would be your short term goals (the next 2-3 years)?
- What would be your longer term goals (5-10 years)?
- What do you think the Commonwealth should look like at its 80<sup>th</sup> birthday in 2029?

## 9. WHAT DO YOU THINK ABOUT THE COMMONWEALTH (AGAIN)?

Objective: to gauge how far participants' opinions have changed as a result of finding out more about the Commonwealth and therefore what impact learning more can have.

Suggested questions:

- Have you found out anything about the Commonwealth today that surprised you?
- Has your opinion about the Commonwealth changed at all as a result of this discussion? If so, in what way?
- Do you feel more positive, more negative, or about the same towards the Commonwealth after the discussion?

Appendix 1 – Recording Consent Form

1. I, \_\_\_\_\_ [insert name], agree to participate in this 'Commonwealth Chat' as part of the Commonwealth Conversation Project.
2. The 'Commonwealth Chat' is taking place at \_\_\_\_\_ [insert location], \_\_\_\_\_ [insert country] on \_\_\_\_\_ [insert date].
3. I give permission for the comments that I make during the 'Commonwealth Chat' to be filmed/recorded/noted down by the facilitator. I understand that the taping/recording will be used by the Royal Commonwealth Society, managers of the Commonwealth Conversation project, to collect information about global public opinion and knowledge about the Commonwealth.
4. I give permission for extracts of the recording/film to be used on the Commonwealth Conversation website ([www.thecommonwealthconversation.org](http://www.thecommonwealthconversation.org)) as an example of discussions that are taking place around the world. I understand that no personal information about me will be made available on the website in conjunction with this.

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix 2 - FINDING OUT A BIT MORE ABOUT THE COMMONWEALTH

- The Commonwealth is a voluntary association, made up of 53 member countries.
- The Commonwealth's membership stretches across all the world's continents and oceans and includes 1.8 billion people, or 30% of the world's population. Over half are young people aged 25 or under.
- The Commonwealth's member nations are extremely diverse. They include Canada, the world's largest territory and Nauru, the world's smallest republic. They include Namibia, the world's driest country and Guyana which has some of the world's best conserved tropical forests.
- Some of today's most rapidly industrialising countries, such as India and Malaysia, are members. So too are Mozambique and Tanzania which are among the world's poorest countries.
- All of the world's major religions are practised within the Commonwealth.
- Commonwealth countries share similar systems of law, public administration and education.

### Appendix 3 – THE COMMONWEALTH’S ROLE AND VALUE

- The aims of the Commonwealth are to promote democracy, human rights, the rule of law, individual liberty, equality, free trade, and world peace.
- In 2009 the modern Commonwealth is celebrating its 60<sup>th</sup> Anniversary. In 1949 the London Declaration marked the start of a new, modern Commonwealth when it agreed that all member countries would be ‘freely and equally associated’.
- In the 1950s and 1960s many countries that had recently gained independence from Britain, joined the new Commonwealth. Ghana achieved independence in 1957 and became the first majority ruled African member of the Commonwealth. In the 1970s and 1980s it became a key player in international affairs when it campaigned for democracy in Rhodesia and South Africa.
- In 1971 Commonwealth leaders adopted the Singapore Declaration of Commonwealth Principles. This is a formal code of ethics and means that member states are committed to improving human rights and to racial and economic justice.
- In 1991 the Harare Declaration confirmed the Commonwealth’s commitment to promoting democracy, human rights and the rule of law, and sustainable economic and social development.
- The Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group includes 9 Foreign Ministers from Commonwealth countries. It is responsible for deciding what action should be taken against any Commonwealth country that goes against its key principles. Some countries have been suspended from the Commonwealth for going against these principles (e.g. Pakistan, Fiji).
- The Commonwealth runs a whole range of programmes including helping with election monitoring (e.g. in Ghana, Maldives, and Sierra Leone), developing new constitutions and political dialogue (e.g. in Swaziland), training judges; scholarships (25,000 people have benefitted from Commonwealth scholarships), distance learning schemes and teacher training; environmental work; and helping to combat disease and to train medical staff.
- As well as the official Commonwealth that meets on a government-to-government basis, there are 90 other affiliated organisations that make up the wider Commonwealth family. These range from professional associations of lawyers, parliamentarians or local government leaders, to advocacy organisations on human rights and the environment, and to youth exchange and scholarship programmes.
- Commonwealth Heads of Government meet every two years to discuss how best to work together and meetings at ministerial and official level are also held regularly. Every country, large or small, rich or poor, has an equal voice and decisions are taken by consensus: that is, with the agreement of all.