



Birmingham
Commonwealth
Association
Partnerships / Collaboration / Outcomes

Who are we?

Message from the Leader

I am delighted to be able to write in support of the Birmingham Commonwealth Association; its creation in March 2014 being the product of Birmingham City Council's Distinctly Birmingham International strategy for the city.

As one of the largest local authorities in Europe, we have come to realise that there must be an increased emphasis on enhancing Birmingham's profile, reputation and influence beyond Europe. The Commonwealth of 53 nation states accounting for 2 billion of the world's 7 billion people presents obvious opportunities. The Commonwealth is of particular relevance to Birmingham due to the international complexion of our city where 42% of its citizens are from ethnic groups other than white, many of whom maintain contact with their countries of origin. The importance of these links should not be under estimated. In a globalised, inter-connected world, these country connections offer the city an enormous opportunity to use its citizens as city ambassadors in support of a number of its ambitions. Of particular interest are those ambitions around education, culture, cohesion, trade and investment. Ambitions which I am happy to see are reflected in the sub-groups making up the Birmingham Commonwealth Association.

I would like to take this opportunity to wish you continuing success in helping to bring the benefit of our Commonwealth engagement to the citizens of Birmingham.

**John Clancy, Leader,
Birmingham City
Council**



Who are we? Birmingham Commonwealth Association

Founded in 2014, Birmingham Commonwealth Association (BCA) is part of Birmingham City Council's **Distinctly Birmingham European and International Strategy**. The strategy aims to strengthen international partnerships, trade and investment, engaged and cohesive communities, academic partnerships and improve 'joined-up' working with city partners. In 2016, the association became a not-for-profit organisation limited by guarantee thus strengthening its ability to achieve its objectives.

The BCA's mission is to engage, partner, collaborate and network with those in the city and beyond who are outcome driven and who have an interest in promoting Birmingham, its organisations, businesses and communities while recognising the real opportunities the Commonwealth offers. Our work is further strengthened through Birmingham's sister city relationship with Johannesburg, South Africa as well as enjoying excellent connections with other Commonwealth countries through the Commonwealth Local Government Forum. Recently we have become a branch of the Royal Commonwealth Society giving access to a broad range of partners across the Commonwealth.

The BCA aims to build on these connections to the benefit of Birmingham and its citizens. Our three subgroups reflect the interest of our members and comprise:

- **Trade and Business:** to build Birmingham's global competitiveness and influence and in turn, create growth and jobs, by engaging and collaborating with both the business and public sector and organisations supporting the business community.
- **Communities Group:** engaging with communities'

sporting and cultural organisations to promote Commonwealth values, celebrate the input of Birmingham society by Commonwealth citizens, increase community safety, cohesion and inclusion.

- **Education:** engaging with universities, colleges, schools and other academic establishments to promote Commonwealth values, learning, knowledge and innovation.

The Commonwealth and our connection with it, is at the heart of our work.

The Birmingham Commonwealth Association is chaired by Keith Stokes-Smith FCIS, ACMA, a Magistrate and President of the Birmingham Consular Association. Commenting, Mr Stokes-Smith said "We have now put in place some of the foundation stones for what I know will be a sustainable and successful organisation which will contribute to the outcomes of Birmingham and Greater Birmingham through its engagement and support in the areas referred to above. The Commonwealth and our Commonwealth links are a vastly undervalued resource as are the opportunities the Commonwealth offers. We will



persevere in accessing these opportunities.

Our three current areas of focus have the opportunity to deliver positive outcomes not only for the City of Birmingham and indeed its neighbouring cities, towns and villages but also for those individuals, businesses and organisations which engage with us and those we ourselves engage with. Collaboration, partnership and co-ordination are just a few simple mechanisms to more effectively and efficiently bring about added value results. Lets not close our eyes to opportunity.

Membership of any of the three Focus Groups within the Association is at no cost and is open to all; I encourage you to come and indeed stay on board for the journey.

We look forward, together with your help and some positive thinking, to delivering our mutual agendas."

Keith Stokes-Smith

Benefits of working with us Our Networks

Our networks include:

- Royal Commonwealth Society with its Commonwealth Branches in Europe, Asia, Pacific, Africa and the Americas
- Foreign and Commonwealth Office
- Commonwealth High Commissions in London and beyond
- Commonwealth Local Government Forum
- Commonwealth Business Women's Network

- UKTI
- Birmingham and Solihull Chambers of Commerce
- Federation of Small Businesses
- Birmingham Asian Chamber
- Birmingham Association of Youth Clubs
- Community Groups in Birmingham and Greater Birmingham
- Academic Institutions in Birmingham
- Birmingham Consular Association
- Local Commonwealth Diplomats

Why the Commonwealth? A trade and business perspective

Illustrious economist, Ruth Lea CBE, sets out a clear case for why we shouldn't underestimate the power of our Commonwealth relationship from an **Economists for Britain** perspective:



Commonwealth countries considered together as an economic entity are rarely discussed in Britain. Yet they account for over 16% of world GDP and contain over 2 billion of the world's 7 billion people. The modern 53-member Commonwealth spans five continents and contains developed, emerging and developing economies. It also comprises some of the world's largest economies and several of the smallest. The 12 largest Commonwealth countries account for 95% of total GDP. In its diversity it captures the character of the 21st century globalised economy as no other economic grouping can. The Commonwealth's membership includes two of the world's largest ten economies (the UK and India), two members of the G7 (Canada and the UK) and five members of the G20 (the UK, India, Canada, Australia and South Africa). The Commonwealth has global significance and huge potential.

Apart from its sheer size there are three factors which are relevant to trade:

- They have favourable demographics and growth prospects. Their working populations are projected to increase between 2010 and 2100 and, insofar as economic growth is positively correlated with growth in the working population, they are set to be the growth markets of the future, alongside the US, China and other buoyant economies. Specifically, the Commonwealth's demographics compare very favourably with several major European countries, where working populations will age and shrink.
- Secondly, because of shared history and commonalities of language, law and business practice, it has been estimated that Commonwealth countries trading with one another experience business costs 10-15% lower than similar dealings with non-Commonwealth countries of comparable size and GDP. This has been called the "Commonwealth advantage".

- Thirdly, the Commonwealth also has the advantage of being a group of friendly (non-threatening and non-adversarial) countries which includes many with deep reserves of key natural resources.

Other advantages include:

- According to the International Monetary Fund's October forecast, the Commonwealth's GDP could be comfortably ahead of the EU28's GDP (Purchasing Power Parity terms) in 2019. The IMF suggested that the Commonwealth could have a 17.7% share of global output compared with the EU28's 15.3%. Given the faster average growth rates the Commonwealth can then be expected to pull further ahead of the EU28.
- In GDP terms (Market Exchange Rates), the EU28 is still expected to be significantly larger than the Commonwealth in 2019. But as the 21st century proceeds, and the emerging and developing Commonwealth countries get richer, their currencies should appreciate and the nominal GDP estimates should tend to converge with the GDP estimates.
- The incomes per capita and, hence, disposable incomes, in emerging and developing countries are still well down on those in developed countries. But a recent Ernst and Young report on emerging markets concluded that "...large populations and rapid economic growth mean China and India will become the powerhouses of middle class consumerism over the next two decades." Such a development is crucially important for trade.
- The share of UK exports to the EU28 (44½%) was still significantly higher in 2013 than the share to the Commonwealth (8%). But the EU share is falling, whilst the Commonwealth share is rising, albeit rather slowly. Moreover, the UK ran surpluses with several Commonwealth countries in 2013 whereas the UK ran a deficit of over £56bn with the EU.

