



**THE ROYAL COMMONWEALTH SOCIETY**  
AT THE COMMONWEALTH CLUB

RCS/YouGov Commonwealth 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary poll

EMBARGOED until 00:01 Monday 9 March 2009

New poll finds British public knows little but feels warmly about Commonwealth

Although the British public still feel warmly about the Commonwealth, its relative importance to them has fallen significantly and the level of knowledge about the Commonwealth is poor. These are the major findings of a new nationally representative YouGov survey of British residents commissioned by the Royal Commonwealth Society (RCS) to mark the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Commonwealth.

The modern Commonwealth was founded in 1949 and now includes 53 member states. Commonwealth Day falls on Monday 9 March 2009 and the RCS organises a multi-faith Observance held in Westminster Abbey with The Queen. This year's theme for Commonwealth Day, 'Serving a new generation', is focused on youth.

#### Key findings

- Some 42% of respondents said they would be unhappy about the UK withdrawing from the Commonwealth, compared to 4% who said they would be happy. However, there were also high levels of indifference, with some 55% of respondents saying they wouldn't mind or didn't know.
- Only one in five respondents could name any of the activities undertaken by the Commonwealth, and of those the overwhelming majority identified the Commonwealth Games. However, some 70% of respondents could correctly identify the Queen as the Head of the Commonwealth.
- When asked to identify which major international bodies were valuable to the UK, only a third (33%) of respondents chose the Commonwealth, compared to 44% for NATO, 42% for the UN, 37% for the EU and 35% for the G8.
- Only 14% of respondents identified the Commonwealth as the most important to the UK (compared to 36% saying Europe and 32% saying America). This is a significant reduction on the 34% of respondents who said the Commonwealth was most important to the UK in a March 1969 Gallup poll (compared to 34% saying America and 21% saying Europe at that time).

- Younger respondents were less familiar with the Commonwealth than older groups: they had more trouble correctly identifying members of the Commonwealth, where its headquarters were or who the head of the Commonwealth was. Some 8% of 18-34 year olds thought the US was a member and 3% thought President Obama was the head of the Commonwealth. One percent thought Bono was the head.
- While some 53% of older people (55+) would be appalled or sorry if the UK withdrew from the Commonwealth, only 35% of 18-34 year olds felt this way.

Dr Danny Sriskandarajah, Director of the Royal Commonwealth Society, said:

“The Commonwealth has achieved much in the last 60 years, but beyond sports and the Sovereign, British people appear to know little about what the Commonwealth is or does.

“Younger Brits don’t seem to know or care much about the 53-member grouping. If the Commonwealth is to thrive over the next 60 years, it needs to devise new ways of reaching out to younger generations.

“Although Britain looks to Europe and America far more than in the past, the UK Government needs to pay adequate attention to an association that spans rich, poor, big and small, and is critical in promoting international understanding and democracy.”

#### Notes to Editors

The Royal Commonwealth Society (RCS) is the oldest and largest civil society organisation devoted to the Commonwealth. Founded in 1868, the RCS conducts a range of events and activities aimed at promoting international understanding. It is an independent registered charity that has its headquarters at the Commonwealth Club in London, some 5000 UK members and a presence in some 40 Commonwealth countries through a network of branches and Commonwealth societies.

The poll was undertaken by YouGov Plc between 2 – 4 March 2009. Total sample size was 2,119 adults. The survey was carried out online. The figures have been weighted and are representative of all GB adults (aged 18+). Full results can be downloaded from the RCS website at [www.thercs.org/society/news](http://www.thercs.org/society/news) from Monday 9 March.

To mark Commonwealth Week, the RCS is organising a series of activities to engage people on Commonwealth issues:

- The Commonwealth Day Observance at Westminster Abbey on Monday 9 March 2009, will be attended by H.M. The Queen, Head of the Commonwealth, H.R.H. The Duke of Edinburgh, President Yoweri Museveni, the Chairperson in Office of the Commonwealth, the UK Prime Minister Gordon Brown, Lord Malloch-Brown, Minister of State in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and other dignitaries. Celebrity readers will include Kwame Kwei-Armah and Dame Tanni Grey-Thompson and performers include the One Voice Community Choir. The Observance is the UK's largest multi-faith service, attended by the nine principal religious leaders and some 2,000 guests including 1,000 young people from schools and youth organisations across the UK. The service, commencing at 3.15pm Monday 9 March 2009, will celebrate the importance and achievements of young people from across the Commonwealth.
- Commonwealth Youth Outreach workshop. 60 young people – most of whom know nothing about the Commonwealth – will learn about the organisation's aims and activities through interactive, youth-led workshops. The diverse participants, many with roots in other Commonwealth countries, will be drawn from groups such as the Damilola Taylor Trust and Kingston Youth Service. They will find out about the Commonwealth's work promoting intercultural exchange and facilitating conflict resolution. The programme was planned by the RCS and the Youth Action Group of the Commonwealth Youth Exchange Council. The event to be held at 10.30am on Monday 9 March 2009 is supported by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and will be opened by Lord Malloch-Brown.
- Commonwealth Women's Antarctic Expedition launch. Eight young women from around the Commonwealth are going to ski to the South Pole, taking them across more than 500 miles of the most hostile environment on Earth. Many have no previous expedition or cold weather experience. The team members from Cyprus, Ghana, Brunei and Jamaica will become the first people from their country (male or female) to ski to the South Pole. Those from India, Singapore and New Zealand will become the first women. All the women taking part will undertake a programme of lectures and school talks to inspire others – particularly women and girls – in their home countries. The team will hold their official expedition launch at the RCS at 6.15 pm on Monday 9 March 2009, with celebrity ambassadors including Miss Dynamite, Baroness Betty Boothroyd and Kate Hoey, MP.

- On Tuesday 10 March 2009, President Yoweri Museveni of Uganda will open an art exhibition by leading young Ugandan artist Ismael Katerrega. The exhibition will be on display in the Commonwealth Club until 16 April 2009 and is open to the public.

Media are welcome at any of these events.

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The Observance is a royal rota event and the usual conditions apply. For press seats in the Abbey, contact Duncan Jeffery at Westminster Abbey on 07738 544 692.

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