



Scotland in the Commonwealth

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The Commonwealth of Nations, usually known simply as The Commonwealth, is a global association of 54 member states, all but two of which were parts of the former British Empire. The expression “Commonwealth of Nations” was first coined by a Scot, the fifth Earl of Rosebery (later Prime Minister), in 1884 during a visit to Australia, when he recognised that change was inevitable in the face of the movement towards independence by the nations of the Empire.

The name British Commonwealth of Nations was formally adopted at the 1926 Imperial Conference, and, with one after another of the member countries of the Empire gaining their independence, in 1949 the term “British” was finally dropped from the title in order to reflect the institution’s changing nature. The modern Commonwealth has long since outgrown its imperial origins to become a considerable force for good on the world stage in its own right, with recognition by and status at the United Nations.

Nowadays, the independent member states of the Commonwealth, with a total population of over 2,000 millions, support each other and work together towards shared goals. These include the promotion of democracy, human rights, good governance, the rule of law, individual liberty, egalitarianism, free trade, development cooperation, multilateralism and world peace.

The Commonwealth is not a political union, but an intergovernmental organisation in which countries with diverse social, political and economic backgrounds are regarded as equal in status, with decision making by consensus. Membership by independent Scotland would be as good as automatic.

The many practical advantages of membership include Commonwealth citizenship, educational, youth, sport and other programmes, and for small nations like Scotland consular representation in non-Commonwealth countries.

The principles and aims of the Commonwealth were laid down and developed in a series of major conferences over the years, notably in Singapore, Harare, and not least Edinburgh. These endeavours were crowned in December 2012 with the promulgation of the Charter of the Commonwealth, reproduced on this website. One of the noblest declarations of ethical principles ever formulated by any organisation, the Charter is a document with which Scots can readily identify, and as a nation can guarantee to uphold.

It goes without saying that Scotland's links with the Commonwealth have for centuries been embedded in our national consciousness. There is hardly a family in Scotland that does not have relatives in one or more Commonwealth countries, the residents of which include a large proportion of the estimated 40 million people who constitute the worldwide Scottish diaspora.

Scotland's centuries-old economic links with the Commonwealth countries were severely damaged by the UK's entry into the European Economic Community in 1973, but membership still offers substantial economic opportunities in a market with considerable scope for expansion as development proceeds.

In this connection, the Commonwealth Business Council (CBC), set up in 1997, aims to utilise the global network of the Commonwealth more effectively for the promotion of trade and investment for shared prosperity. The CBC acts as a bridge for cooperation between business and government, concentrating efforts on these specific areas enhancing trade, facilitating ICT for development, mobilising investment, promoting corporate citizenship and public-private partnerships. The CBC has a dedicated team, CBC Technologies, based in London, and is focused on the international technology and global services industry throughout the Commonwealth. In short, the Commonwealth offers Scotland more opportunities for enterprise today than it ever did in imperial times.

As the major Commonwealth Games events in Edinburgh (1970 and 1986) and Glasgow (2014) demonstrate, Scotland has no difficulty in identifying with the Commonwealth as a community, and in playing a positive and vigorous part in its communal life as an equal member.

Scotland can therefore unequivocally affirm its solidarity with all of the aims of the Commonwealth, especially with those values and aspirations set out in its inspiring Charter. As our nation reverts inexorably to its former status of equality within the interdependent global community at large, active participation in the Commonwealth of Nations will not be the least of the goals Scotland will be pursuing.



The flag of the Commonwealth of Nations