Members present

Lord Howell of Guildford (Chairman)
Baroness Armstrong of Hill Top
Lord Foulkes of Cumnock
Baroness Goudie
Baroness Hussein-Ece
Lord Janvrin
Baroness Morris of Bolton
Baroness Nicholson of Winterbourne
Lord Ramsbotham

Examination of Witnesses

Paul Arkwright, Director of Multilateral Policy, Foreign and Commonwealth Office,
Caitlin Jones, Head of the Commonwealth Team, Foreign and Commonwealth Office,
Baroness Prashar, House of Lords, and HE Mr Carlos dos Santos, High Commissioner
for the Republic of Mozambique

Q152 The Chairman: Thank you all very much for coming before the Committee this
afternoon. We are very grateful to you. I should start with a formal point. A note on the
declared interests of the Committee is, I think, in front of you. I hope it will help you to
understand where our interests lie and the issues that we are pursuing. This is quite a short
session. We want to focus on two major issues, although there are many subordinate
aspects to them, in relation to the Commonwealth. The first is what value you see to
member countries, particularly to this country because we are a UK Committee in the
British Parliament, of the promotion of interests, reputation, so-called soft diplomacy, trade
and other interests by being members of the Commonwealth. How does it help the
members, and how does it help this member in particular?

The second issue, which flows from that, is what soft power, or diplomatic influence and
pressure, do you think the Commonwealth as an institution and an organised membership of
53 countries—I think it is 53 as of this morning—has in the world and what weight it carries.
So there are two questions. If we can, let us stick mainly to the first one first, giving in
particular your very expert views on how Britain fits into this nowadays first. We will then
move on to the broader question of the Commonwealth’s own weight and effect in world
affairs. That is my menu. Who would like to volunteer to start? If there is no volunteer, I
shall name one of you. Shall we start with Baroness Prashar, because she has been involved
in these things for a long time?

Baroness Prashar: Thank you, Lord Chairman. I thought you might point your finger at me
first. First, I am very glad that you are looking at this particular issue: “The role of the
Commonwealth in relation to Britain’s soft power”. Let me first say what I think soft power
is. For me it is a kind of purposeful engagement to attract and influence in order to shape
the environment in which we are operating. The world is changing, and fast. The situation is
very fluid, and it is becoming a world of networks. In that sense, Britain has to find its place
in that landscape and decide how we engage with this changing world. To me, the Commonwealth is essentially a network organisation. Its strength is that it is not just an intergovernmental organisation; it is a Commonwealth of people. You will see from my kind of engagement that it has been mainly through civil society organisations. Therefore Britain can engage on a whole range of issues, may they be cultural, diplomatic, trade, business, educational, through the Commonwealth. I would like to see Britain playing a much more proactive role. Having said that, I am conscious, Lord Chairman, that you have been quite active in promoting that.

I do think that there is ambivalence on the part of the UK about the Commonwealth, which is partly a certain diffidence about the post-colonial legacy but also because we do not want to be seen as the place where the secretariat is and as a dominant body in that. I think the time has come to do what I have called an unsentimental review of what the Commonwealth has to offer and demonstrate how we can begin to engage with it. I am conscious that the Royal Commonwealth Society, where I was a chairman and then a president—of course, you are now the president—has produced reports trying to identify where trade is a big factor in a number of the emerging economies within the Commonwealth. Secondly, there are certain advantages to the Commonwealth, and we began to demonstrate where the Commonwealth adds value. It seems to me that we have to look at those. I will come in later questions to the sort of engagement and reform that is necessary and where Britain can play a role in engaging with the Commonwealth, in a positive way, in order to make sure that the right kind of reform takes place, so that the Commonwealth’s potential can be fully realised.

The Chairman: Thank you. That is very helpful indeed. We have two representatives from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office here. Mr Arkwright, your overview, your bailiwick I suppose, is of course multilateral organisations generally, of which the Commonwealth is clearly one. Is it just one, or is it rather more special?

Paul Arkwright: It is different. I think it is special, if I can put it that way. To pick up what Baroness Prashar said, it is a unique organisation that has particular core values that are spread throughout the countries that are represented there and that are, I think, a very powerful vehicle for us, the UK, to spread those core values. I would pick up what Baroness Prashar was saying about the people-to-people links. It is important at an intergovernmental level, as we will see that at the coming CHOGM in Sri Lanka, but perhaps more important than that it is important because it brings people together in different fora, whether in the youth forum, the people’s forum or the Commonwealth Business Council—trade is another area. It provides a kind of facilitation role for bringing people together, and I think that when you bring people together on the basis of those core values, something very powerful can happen. What is important, and again I agree with Baroness Prashar, is that we the UK have a very clear understanding of where our role in that can add value. We can come on to discuss particular examples of that.

I would describe the Commonwealth as an organisation, among the many that I cover in my current role.

Q153 The Chairman: Thank you. High Commissioner, in this first part of the discussion we are discussing Britain’s affairs more. Perhaps you are not quite as familiar with the Commonwealth, but you have been an ambassador in all sorts of countries in Europe and your country is a marvellous example of somewhere that after all was not part of the original old British Empire link at all, or of the British Commonwealth. Yet you have not only adhered to the Commonwealth but proved to be extremely dynamic and influential, and we all watch with great admiration as Mozambique advances its position in the world. How do
you see yourselves in the Commonwealth? What gain are you getting? Give us a little glimpse of how you see us as well.

Mr Carlos dos Santos: Thank you very much, my Lords. Let me start by saying how grateful and appreciative we are to be invited to this Select Committee and to be involved. We value your work on soft power. We think it is a very important concept, as developed by Professor Joseph Nye. We are looking for the more positive side of soft power, because it can also be used on the other side to get things the wrong way.

For Mozambique, being part of the Commonwealth is, I think, special. We find a new identity, which we did not have before, of belonging to an association that is based on the common values of development, democracy, the rule of law and human rights, that we share. We also value the fact that the diverse membership of the Commonwealth is recognised as a wealth in the organisation, in the sense that small and large countries, developed countries and less developed countries work together in solidarity. There is concern for the most vulnerable states. We have a focus on small states, in the strategic plan that we have been discussing, and we have a very particular focus on specific areas.

Mozambique values work in the social area as well, and we have made this vehemently clear in discussions on the strategic plan. Some countries were saying that education and health, for instance, should be outsourced because we do not have competencies in the Commonwealth, and we said no. We think that is very well appreciated by many in the Commonwealth, and is concrete; the Commonwealth can be identified with scholarship and other educational programmes. We value the focus on youth, which is very important, and gender issues. We also value the Commonwealth Foundation work with civil society; it is quite involving.

We think the UK has done a great deal in the area of soft power. I was just reading some notes, in preparation for this meeting, which say that the UK is actually considered to be on top of the soft power index. If the UK continues to do the sort of cultural things that it has done in the past and does things in a way that attracts people to UK universities and things like that, the UK will continue to be a valued partner. In the Commonwealth, everyone, including Mozambique, wants to be a very good partner of the UK because of what it has to offer.

I would just like to add the caveat that I added to my notes when I was preparing for this meeting, which is the issues linked to immigration policies and the way the UK deals with students who are candidates for universities here. If this is not done properly, it will decrease UK’s attractiveness, and it is starting to be like that. I was not thinking of the good news that came from Beijing—that there will be a facilitation of visas—when I was jotting down my notes, but that is a good approach: facilitating people to come here and welcoming them. Of course, you do not want to attract terrorists or other such people, but the majority of people who come to the UK are good people, so they should be welcomed.

Those would be my initial reactions.

The Chairman: Thank you very much indeed for that. I am going to come to Caitlin Jones in a moment as well—our fourth witness today—but there are some questions first. Lord Foulkes wanted to intervene.

Q154 Lord Foulkes of Cumnock: Thank you, Lord Chairman. I wonder whether, perhaps on both sides of the table, we are being a bit starry eyed about this. Let me mention four things. The Gambia has just announced that it is leaving the Commonwealth. I have just come back from the CPA conference in Johannesburg, and we saw really very strong
tensions between the old and the new Commonwealth. At CHOGM, issues are going to be raised about human rights in Sri Lanka. The OAU has just said that African countries are no longer going to pay attention to the International Court of Justice. Surely we have to be a bit more realistic and imaginative and take a different approach from what you suggest. Do you not think you have been a little complacent and taken things rather more rosily than the reality of what is happening in the Commonwealth now?

The Chairman: Caitlin Jones, you are on the front line of this. Would you like to answer it?

Lord Foulkes of Cumnock: That is the easy question.

Caitlin Jones: I take the easy ones.

The Chairman: Then I am going to bring in others as well. Would you like a shot at that question first?

Caitlin Jones: Thank you Chairman. Lord Foulkes, you make very good points, of course. Every organisation faces challenges and differences of opinion between member states, and the Commonwealth is not unique in that at all. The important thing is that the Commonwealth can come together and work together to address the issues that it faces.

Lord Foulkes of Cumnock: How?

Baroness Goudie: They are certainly not doing that now.

Lord Foulkes of Cumnock: All of you have said that you can do that, but you have not given us specific examples.

Caitlin Jones: I will, if I may, take the example of the CPA conference, which of course I was not at. I understand that some very knotty issues were addressed at that conference, and that there were some very frank debates on a number of difficult issues. I am aware of those debates travelling as a thread through a number of layers of the Commonwealth. We have discussed the layers that exist in the multilayered organisation. The fact that those debates exist in the CPA conference, in different parts of civil society and at the intergovernmental level, and are taken forward is very important, because they touch every level. We would not expect to make a difference overnight on the knottiest issues. We have to be realistic about the fact that we cannot create change overnight on many of these very ingrained cultural issues, but we can work together, slowly and surely, to address them and to talk about them in an open space. That is what the Commonwealth provides.

Lord Foulkes of Cumnock: I will just give you an example. If I had been on your side of the thing, I would have said that one of the first things the Government should do, if they are making it easier for rich Chinese to come into Britain, is to make it easier for poor people from the Commonwealth to come into Britain to study at universities, instead of making some of the difficulties that exist. Some Caribbean countries have to travel to another country to get a visa to come to the United Kingdom.

Baroness Armstrong of Hill Top: Not just in the Caribbean.

Lord Foulkes of Cumnock: Could I just get an answer on specific things, such as visa liberalisation? Would that not be helpful, for example?

The Chairman: What do we say about visa liberalisation, which has been raised by the High Commissioner as well? Might that be specific to the Commonwealth, or is that an impossible idea?
Baroness Prashar: Can I just come in here? I think your point about liberalisation and visa issues is very important. I agree with you, because if we think that the Commonwealth is a family—if I may say so, High Commissioners are not Ambassadors; it is a family—it is important that Britain is seen to be treating the Commonwealth citizens on the basis of equality. That is very true.

On your earlier point about us being starry eyed, I am not sure that we are, because the issues that you raise about Gambia, CHOGM, and of course the tension between the old and the new Commonwealth over human rights issues are very relevant, but we should not let those issues cloud our judgment about the Commonwealth’s potential. You say you cannot, but I feel very strongly that we need to reform the institution, which I can come to later. The point was made earlier that these issues and tensions are as in any other organisation. Look at the United Nations: what about the Security Council meetings and so on. This is something of a feature: the fact that there is a forum through which these issues are being discussed is very important. You have to go beyond the issue and ask why Gambia has pulled out. There may be other reasons that one needs to look at. People play politics with that. It is true that the Commonwealth’s moral authority may be seen to be under siege, given CHOGM and Sri Lanka, but this is why it is all the more important to demonstrate why the Commonwealth is important and why it is a platform. I am very anxious that we do not use the current difficulties to destroy a platform, a network, that in my mind is a network of the future even though it might have been created in the last century, and to lose it. Therefore Britain should engage with it very positively.

On the point about the tension between the old and the new Commonwealth, when I was in Perth about two years ago, it was clear to me that human rights issues were more about language. Human rights issues were seen to be an imposition by the west.

Baroness Goudie: I am sorry, but I find that quite unacceptable.

Baroness Prashar: Could you just let me explain what I am saying?

Baroness Goudie: I do not see that.

The Chairman: We must allow the witness to speak.

Baroness Goudie: I am sorry.

Baroness Prashar: When you look at human rights development, the issues are all interrelated. I just think that we have to begin to look at these issues. That is why the Commonwealth provides the dialogue and a place where these things can be discussed.

Lord Foulkes of Cumnock: There was not much of a dialogue.

The Chairman: I must let other people ask questions. We have limited time. Lord Janvrin is next on my list. I am sorry, but we must do it this way. Then it is Baroness Goudie.

Q155  Lord Janvrin: It may allow a development of this. I wanted to explore, Baroness Prashar, your point that the institution needs reforming, what you meant by that, and how the UK could get more out of it. I would also like to ask the Foreign and Commonwealth representatives to respond to those ideas, and to answer the point that many commentators feel that to some extent the Commonwealth works better at a sub-government level, at a civil society level, and that that is where the networking and the connections really happen. If that is the case, what is the Government’s policy to encourage that? First of all, I would like to hear your point about reform, Baroness Prashar, because I think I might share some of your views.
Baroness Prashar: I think you are absolutely right. I would like to see a lot more engagement with the civil society organisations, because the Commonwealth has myriad professional civil society organisations and I am not sure that they are supported and engaged with. The Commonwealth Foundation does some good work, as do the Commonwealth Magistrates and Judges Association and the Nurses Federation, but they are very much starved of resources and proper engagement. If you call it a network and it is a people’s Commonwealth, it is very important that the focus is not just on the intergovernmental machinery but that we make sure that we make the non-governmental organisations, the civil society organisations, more effective. That is the area where I would like to see a shift in emphasis.

The Chairman: Would Paul Arkwright or Caitlin Jones like to comment on Commonwealth reform?

Lord Janvrin: Particularly on that point, which I confirm now that I share.

Paul Arkwright: The point about the sub-governmental level?

Lord Janvrin: Yes, and how you can do more to encourage those sub-governmental networks.

Paul Arkwright: First of all, I think we are doing quite a lot to encourage those networks, both through support for the youth forum that I mentioned and through the people’s forums and getting civil society acting together, but I would perhaps challenge the premise that nothing useful can be done at governmental level. This comes to Lord Foulkes’ question about what the point is when you have these serious clashes, which I saw evidence of, I have to say. I was at the United Nations during the General Assembly week and I attended the Commonwealth Foreign Ministers meeting. Some of you might have been to them. There was a sharp exchange there between certain people who you might describe as on the side of the values argument and those who might be described as on the side of the development argument. I would argue that the two are very closely connected. I saw it for myself, Lord Foulkes, and I know exactly what you are talking about. Does that invalidate the Commonwealth as a forum in which you should discuss these issues? I would say not. In fact, the Commonwealth provides the forum for—let us be explicit here—the Canadian Foreign Minister to criticise the Sri Lankan Foreign Minister and to do so in very direct terms. I would say that there is a usefulness in that which is not undermined by the fact that these are very sharp exchanges.

Coming back to the reform point—I also have a point to make about visas; I am collecting a few of these issues—there was out of Perth/CHOGM a reform programme which the Secretary-General of the Commonwealth was asked to pursue. He is doing so, and we are supporting and encouraging him to move faster with that reform programme. We do think there are areas in which we can improve the efficiency and the effectiveness of the organisation, and we are working with the Commonwealth Secretariat in order to do that very directly.

Can the organisation be better aligned to what the UK would consider to be its core priorities? I would argue yes, on the basis of a relatively short period in this job. How can we go about doing that? We do that by force of argument, by ensuring that we get the right people in those positions, by pushing that reform agenda, and by using those sub-governmental levels which you talk about—the civil society, the NGOs, the CPA and others—frankly to shout very loudly from the sidelines if they are not very happy with the way it is going. So I would say that we all have a collective responsibility to push that, particularly with the CPA, in which I know many of you are involved.
The Chairman: Baroness Goudie, you wanted to come in on the earlier question. Would you like to go quickly on that?

Baroness Goudie: This question is very simple. In terms of soft power, most people who do not know the Commonwealth around the world—NGOs and others in America and Canada that one comes across—see the Commonwealth as part of Britain, so their perception of our soft power and where we stand on human rights as well as trade and corruption is that we should be giving leadership. An example of this was the Commonwealth meetings last year on mental health and so on in which the Caribbean countries of the Commonwealth did not want to give a lead and were looking to Britain and other countries to deal with the problems for which they needed funding. The perception of us around the world is that we should be trying to persuade these countries that they need to take leadership themselves but in the correct way. Do you see where I am coming from and how it affects our position as a country?

Paul Arkwright: I do. I will respond to that, Lord Chairman, if I may. I agree with you, and it should not be the UK that visibly leads in all these areas. It should be the UK that encourages others to do that and, if I may say so, encourages not just what someone here described as the old Commonwealth but other countries. It is an argument that we need to take to those countries. It is in their interests, frankly, that we pursue some of the values referred to—human rights, good governance, democracy, building democratic institutions. It is incumbent upon us not just the Foreign Office or the Government but everybody who has an interest in the Commonwealth to continue to make those arguments. I think we are making good steps forward. If you look at the Commonwealth’s recent electoral observation and monitoring in Sierra Leone, Kenya and other places, you will see that we have had 70 recent electoral observation missions. They are doing some really good work, and the reports that are coming out are making specific recommendations on how to get it better the next time around. With respect to the question, “Is it all negative?”, the answer is no it is not. Some very positive things are coming out of it which I think we need to celebrate.

The Chairman: Baroness Nicholson, the floor is yours.

Q156 Baroness Nicholson of Winterbourne: I fully subscribe to the point made at the beginning by Paul Arkwright that the Commonwealth is an organisation with particular core values. I therefore fully agree with the High Commissioner’s point that membership gives a new identity to countries that join and reinforces the identity of countries that are members. My two questions are designed to support those points rather than degrade them. First, what activities are undertaken, similar to, say, those of the EAS, to reinforce those core values in different nation states that belong to the Commonwealth? I have not noticed—it may just be my lack of observation or perhaps lack of involvement—on the ground in different nations that belong to the Commonwealth that the EAS is a mirror of what one would hope the Commonwealth would be doing. In other words, that is weekly meetings, discussion of what is happening in a country and how everything is working. The Commonwealth has core values: the fundamental freedoms, the free market, the rule of law and the fight against corruption. It reinforces those in its own meetings collectively. What is happening one layer further down in each Commonwealth nation? Are the Commonwealth nations coming together everywhere every week, like the External Action Service of the EU does? In other words, what are we doing to reinforce those values, if the committee agrees that this is the great strength of the Commonwealth? Secondly, it is of course good to support those values. That assists countries in improving their economy, way of life and the quality of the citizens’ life. That is what the core values are for, everywhere. But, in a word, what are we doing to support assistance to help countries earn a living better? Are we, the
other wealthy nations, following a sort of “Lomé-cum-Cotonou” model? Do we have we a deliberately prioritised programme to assist the poorer nations of the Commonwealth to get the contracts they need to get their arguments forward in the World Trade Organisation, for example, or with the World Bank or IMF? What have we got going that actually reinforces the great strength of the Commonwealth? That strength is to help others earn a living and help the quality of life of the citizens. It comes together to do that, in a different bloc than the other blocs that exist—I believe the Commonwealth is one of the very earliest blocs of rule. Those are my questions. How are we reinforcing these two key things?

**Q157 The Chairman:** The first question, which was very acute, strays slightly into the broader question that we will come to halfway through, which is what the Commonwealth itself could do. The second question is absolutely spot on. What is in it for our different member states? Can I ask the High Commissioner what he feels about this? Does he feel that Mozambique has forces working for it in the Commonwealth structure? Also, while reinforcing Baroness Nicholson’s question, what does he feel about British leadership? Is leadership quite the phrase in a networked world? Are there leaders any more or is it more of a sort of a network where we are all in this together rather than too busy leading each other?

**Mr Carlos dos Santos:** Thank you very much, my Lord. Well, what does Mozambique see as things that are concrete and done by the Commonwealth? On the issue of values, I would just say governance, improving the rule of law and human rights. We are enjoying very concrete benefits. Just to give you one example, earlier this year we had the Minister of Justice visiting London and she requested a meeting with the department that deals with legal issues at the Commonwealth Secretariat. She had a meeting there and agreed with the Commonwealth Secretariat to assist Mozambique specific areas of the justice system. Earlier on in the year, we had a seminar jointly conducted by the Commonwealth Secretariat Human Rights Unit and Ministry of Justice in Mozambique to deal with prison issues there. We invited other countries from the region to be part of that workshop. That is building capacities. There is also the role of CMAG—the Commonwealth committee of Foreign Ministers that deals with issues of core values. There is an expression today in the Commonwealth that a country has been “CMAGed”. That means it has violated the principles and values of the Commonwealth. No country wants to be CMAGed. There is a consciousness developing that countries value the work that that group does. As discussed in Perth, the idea is not to police the countries but to help them make sure that they comply with the values.

On the development side, just another very concrete example is that we had the natural resources unit within the Secretariat go to Mozambique. That was initiated by the High Commission here. I spoke to them. They sent us some staff specialised in natural resources. As you know, Mozambique has just discovered natural gas in huge quantities. The country can have a big leap in terms of development, but only if we manage those resources right. This unit is working with the Government to assist in building their capacities to understand how you manage oil and gas and negotiate contracts. These are very basic things and are a given in other countries of the Commonwealth but they are not a given in Mozambique. They are very important things.

I have just one last point to conclude on. We have a problem of knowledge of what the Commonwealth is doing and can do. The problem is within the Commonwealth but even more so outside it. This has been identified as a problem. The Secretary-General has been asked to make sure that what the Commonwealth does is better known within the
Commonwealth—in the countries of the Commonwealth—and outside it. He is working on a way of dealing with those issues.

The Chairman: That is very important and leads us on to the discussion in a moment.

Baroness Armstrong of Hill Top: Does the Commonwealth Secretariat have a formula that is working to help individual nations gain contracts and have their arguments with the IMF and all the rest of it? Have we got that system going? If not, why not?

The Chairman: Yes, I think that is absolutely the right question.

Mr Carlos dos Santos: They may not have a system like that but some things have gone right. I am thinking of the issue of debt. The issue of external debt has been a big challenge for many developing countries. Mozambique has qualified for HIPC-1 and HIPC-2, and has come to some sustainable levels of debt because of systems and software developed within the Commonwealth. Those are being used today by the Ministry of Finance and the Central Bank of Mozambique. That is one of the good things that the Commonwealth has developed. But I agree with you that if we could have more consensus in terms of negotiating international trade with the WTO, the World Bank and the IMF, building the capacities of developing nations in these areas, we would benefit more.

Q158 Baroness Morris of Bolton: Thank you very much everybody. My question is rather picking up from what Baroness Goudie and Baroness Nicholson were saying, and also what Baroness Prashar and Paul were saying about encouraging networks. I was rather struck when reading all the various materials sent to us for today by Kamalesh Sharma’s letter to the FT in response to Gideon Rachman’s article. Mr Sharma said: “Our Commonwealth soft power and behind the scenes contributions can often be at risk of negative judgment in the short term”. With hard power, when you are doing something you shout about it so that the whole world knows—otherwise there is no point doing it. With soft power, there is this whole interconnection of little things. Baroness Nicholson said that she had not noticed what was happening. I keep hearing about all these wonderful things that are happening. What can we do to make soft power more visible? Then, sometimes, we will not have these tensions as to whether we are doing the right thing.

The Chairman: I suppose we are doing our bit by having this committee.

Baroness Morris of Bolton: We are. I wondered particularly what the Commonwealth was doing.

The Chairman: That is the cry: that it is very hard to fit this soft power into the modern world and the modern media. Do any of our witnesses have some bright ideas on that?

Baroness Prashar: I think this is a real dilemma because it is very difficult to measure the impact of soft power. By its very nature it is long term, through engagement. As I said, you build trust over a period of time. You create an environment in which other things can happen. If I may make another point, it is important that we do not also lose sight of the fact that the soft power is exercised in terms of values, again through the civil society organisations. I can give you examples of a range of projects where people come together. One example: the Royal Commonwealth Society has had its essay competition for years. That is a good way of inculcating values. There are a whole range of projects that I will not go into. Also, taking your point about leadership, in a networked world you can take leadership but it is more about mutual learning and reciprocity. In a way, it is about co-operation and engagement. That is a different way of influencing and attracting each other. You have to understand that. A simple thing would be, that it is important to identify areas where you can communicate that better and get a better understanding. If I may say so, your
Select Committee is a good example of that, where people begin to recognise that these things are very important and see the strength of some of these organisations who work below the radar in doing all this good work. We want to make sure that, sometimes, you have to raise your head above the parapet and make statements. Countries join the Commonwealth because it is an aspiration to imbibe those values. It is a journey. But with those that join the club and then do not comply with the rules of the club, certain action has to be taken. That is the way that you begin to illustrate where the power lies.

**The Chairman:** Paul Arkwright, you wanted to speak on this as well.

**Paul Arkwright:** Yes, and with your permission I will go back to Baroness Nicholson briefly, then I will come to Baroness Morris' points. There are a number of areas. First, the Commonwealth and the External Action Service of the European Union are two very different animals. For example, you talked about weekly meetings. I assume you mean of EU ambassadors in particular countries, which does happen. I was an ambassador in the Netherlands. We did not meet as a Commonwealth group. The Commonwealth as such does not have that kind of convening practice, although we got together for Commonwealth Day. Once a year, the Commonwealth ambassadors in that particular country would get together. The fact that we were in the Commonwealth together gave me a connection with a number of other Commonwealth ambassadors based in The Hague, which I used. I used it more on an ad hoc basis. The convening power of the Commonwealth could be used better but we are using it. The High Commissioner mentioned debt. I would also mention trade, where there is a Commonwealth business council, the Commonwealth Business Forum. I would mention advocacy in the G20 context. Before the G20 summit in St Petersburg, Commonwealth issues were raised through the Commonwealth Secretariat very directly. There is very practical assistance such as an anti-corruption unit in Botswana. In Barbados we have helped to establish a national human rights institution. There are lots of good examples but, coming to Lady Morris' point, they are often beneath the radar. It is a very good question: how do we raise their profile? I see you have a hashtag for this committee so Twitter is obviously one means by which you could do that. I would also say CHOGM. CHOGM will attract the world's attention. It might attract it in ways that the Commonwealth might not be particularly comfortable with but it will attract the world's attention. Around CHOGM and what is happening next month in Sri Lanka there are a number of extremely worthwhile activities going on. If we are clever, we could make the most of the spotlight that the world will put on CHOGM to widen the scope of journalists' interest and say, "That is all very interesting. You are interested in human rights violations by the Sri Lankans, how about coming to the youth forum?"

**The Chairman:** Before we go on, is it correct that the Chinese are sending a very large business delegation to Colombo, as are the Japanese, the Qatars and the UAE?

**Paul Arkwright:** I am told by Caitlin that that is correct. I do not have the numbers but they are particularly interested in the business forum, so the trade element of this is something that they are very well tuned into.

**The Chairman:** Because of time, we must move on. Baroness Hussein-Ece has been waiting very patiently and then we will have Lord Ramsbotham, and then I want to change the tone a bit.

**Q159 Baroness Hussein-Ece:** Thank you, Lord Chairman. We have touched on what I was going to ask. Baroness Prashar at the beginning said the world is changing around the Commonwealth and power is shifting very much in different directions. The landscape around the Commonwealth is pretty much changed. How well do you think the
Commonwealth has dealt with the new rising powers? We have touched on China but there is Brazil, Turkey and other countries like that. How well is the Commonwealth linking in, networking and working with these new powerful countries?

The Chairman: Who would like to go first on that big idea? High commissioner, please.

Mr Carlos dos Santos: Thank you very much. One way that I know is that the Secretary-General of the Commonwealth is mandated by the board of governors to go to the meetings of the G20. This is where Commonwealth interests are brought to the fore by the Secretary-General. That is the main forum, I would say, although there could be others. Certainly, the Commonwealth Business Council is one way—the delegations go to it because they attach great importance to what the council discusses.

If I may, Lord Chairman, I would like to speak about the meeting of the group of ambassadors and Paul’s response. I would add that, although we do not have these meetings of ambassadors around the world, we have the board of governors here, which meets regularly. Also, the board has an executive committee that meets even more regularly, between board meetings. Perhaps we should give it more substance and find ways of bringing more issues to the board and the executive committee. Moreover, the Commonwealth Foundation has the governors meeting—these are all the high commissioners here in London. Mozambique is a member of the board of governors at the foundation and a member of the grants committee, which each year selects projects from around the Commonwealth, involving inventions by youth. The last one that we voted as the number one project was from Kenya. A young man had invented a light bulb that can be produced in Kenya. It is now being used for education in the evening, which was not previously possible in villages. It is easy to work with and it was his invention. We are looking at the possibility of multiplying that to the rest of Kenya and other countries. This was just one of the projects.¹ We had projects for Africa, Asia and the Pacific. I think that this is a wonderful thing. These committees are working here in London. Perhaps we could look at the possibility of having meetings elsewhere, but there is already a vehicle that is being used.

Q: Lord Ramsbotham: This relates to what others have been saying. I must admit that I was interested in the High Commissioner’s comment about prisons. As Chief Inspector of Prisons here, I am involved with the International Centre for Prison Studies and the human rights management of prisons, which is very much soft power oriented. My interest is taking the question of soft power and British influence and saying that the Commonwealth is a soft power organisation. All that you have said about values is really about the values that the Commonwealth is spreading and of which we are now a part—we must think of ourselves as a part and a member of the Commonwealth. Therefore, my question is directed particularly at the High Commissioner. Is there anything that you think we in the United Kingdom should be doing—you have mentioned visas and students, both of which subjects have come up before—to increase the UK’s contribution to the soft power exercised by the Commonwealth?

Mr Carlos dos Santos: Yes, definitely. One of the great things that the UK can do is help to build capacities in countries for the justice system, for police and for prisons. It should work with other Governments to strengthen Commonwealth capacities in these areas. In the Commonwealth, when we speak about good governance and democracy, we tend to look at CMAG and say, “Which countries are breaching the values?” But we could do better by focusing on the things that we can do within the framework of building capacities to prevent

¹ Note from witness: “This was the Awards Program from the Youth Division not the Grants Committee.”
violations from happening. When you work on prevention, probably you will not have the same publicity as when you work on a country’s violations, but it is definitely much better. I would agree with Baroness Prashar that this is not about the UK leading; it is about the UK showing readiness to work with others in a Commonwealth of equals and saying, “We want to be part of this association and make a positive contribution”. I think that that would be very much appreciated.

Baroness Prashar: I think that it is not so much about what Britain can do. The question for me is what Britain can do to increase the capacity of the Commonwealth so that the Commonwealth as an organisation can work better. It is not just a bilateral relationship with other countries; it is about the contribution that we can make where we engage with the Commonwealth as an institution or a network.

Lord Ramsbotham: And where we are a member.

Baroness Prashar: Yes, we are a member. What contribution can we make as a member to increase the Commonwealth’s capacity, whether through professional and non-governmental organisations or at governmental level? We can play a pivotal role without showing leadership in the sense that we own it. An important thing about the Commonwealth is that every member is equal, so it is about mutual learning. It is important that we increase the capacity of the organisation. I want to underline that the organisation is under-utilised and has enormous potential. It is in desperate need of reform and change and it needs to be repositioned. The UK can play an important role in partnership with other bodies. It can do that by listening to members and their needs and by focusing on areas that are a priority for the members.

Q161 The Chairman: In the last 10 minutes, let us see whether we can raise the issue to the global level. There have been a number of questions about how the Commonwealth as an institution fits into this new global order. Later, the Committee will look at how the EU fits into this new global order and radiates its soft power, but where do our witnesses think the Commonwealth as an institution—with its secretariat, its mighty membership, its history and its hope for the future—would be most effective in influencing world affairs? Mr Arkwright, would you like to start on that?

Paul Arkwright: Thank you very much, Lord Chairman. I would focus on young people. I would point out that 60% of the population of the Commonwealth, which is 2.2 billion, are currently under 30. I would focus the efforts on young people for several reasons. The first is that they are the future—that is an obvious point. Secondly, they are much more tuned in to the digital age than, at least, I am, although I cannot speak for others in this room. Thirdly, through education—getting education right and helping people through education—you can indeed make a difference in the world. We are doing that in different ways. If you bear in mind that every year almost 1,000 people from the Commonwealth get scholarships to come and study in this country, you can see that we are actually making a difference, both through the Chevening scholarship and through the Commonwealth Fund.

The Chairman: Is that a two-way process? Are there scholarships around the Commonwealth for British students as well?

Paul Arkwright: Do we pay for British students to go and study in Commonwealth countries? Is that your question?

The Chairman: No, it is whether other parts of the Commonwealth offer scholarships that we take up, just as we offer scholarships that they take up.
Paul Arkwright: I do not know the answer to that question. I will have to come back to you on that, unless Caitlin knows.

Caitlin Jones: Yes, there are opportunities for British students to study abroad, particularly for Masters degrees, as I understand it, in other Commonwealth countries.

The Chairman: Sorry, I just interrupted. Carry on with what you were saying.

Baroness Armstrong of Hill Top: Can they get visas?

Paul Arkwright: Can who get visas? Those who have received scholarships?

Baroness Armstrong of Hill Top: Commonwealth students coming here.

Paul Arkwright: Yes.

Baroness Armstrong of Hill Top: Always?

Paul Arkwright: I cannot speak for every single Commonwealth scholar. One question that has come up is whether it is right to differentiate students, businesspeople or other people coming to the UK because they are Commonwealth citizens. The policy of the Government up to now has been that, on trade, for example, we are focused on individual bilateral trade relationships—for example, with India and with the emerging powers. I think that it is fair to say that there is probably an unconscious bias towards those countries with which trading is easier. Nobody has so far mentioned the English language as probably the biggest and most powerful tool of soft power that the UK can profit from. To answer your question about how we can make the difference, there are elements in all of that on which we can focus. Youth, education, scholarships and building capacity in those areas are, to my mind, one way in which we can really make a difference for the future.

Lord Foulkes of Cumnock: I am very glad that Mr Arkwright mentioned language, as I had written it down. I am glad that he is focusing on examples, because the difficulty that we have had with all the witnesses is in getting them to think about specific examples. One of the best examples is happening in Glasgow next year—the Commonwealth Games.

Paul Arkwright: Indeed. I am coming to them.

Lord Foulkes of Cumnock: Sport is one. Education is another. Before I went to South Africa, I went to Lesotho, where I found out that there is a wonderful link between Wales and Lesotho. All these young pupils had been to Wrexham and were back in Lesotho singing the Welsh national anthem in Welsh. This is fantastic. These are the practical things that we want you to suggest more of—in education, in the arts and in music—rather than theoretical comments. Have you any more?

Paul Arkwright: Caitlin has a book full of them that we can send you. I totally agree with you. The Commonwealth Games are a powerful example of that. The Queen’s baton relay, which has just started off, will travel through all 71 territories that are participating in the Games. Somebody made a rather unkind comparison between the wonderful event of the lighting of that baton with what happened in Sochi when the fire went out, but I will not go there. I think that this is a very important point. Linking the Commonwealth Games, the sporting activities, the youth and indeed business—we are looking at how we can develop a business forum round the Commonwealth Games next year in Scotland—is another element that we need to look at.

The Chairman: I think that Lord Foulkes’s question is really clarifying the whole point of this theme. In the Commonwealth, even if its heads of government occasionally clash, the elbows, feet and arms of government and the non-governmental activities continue to
integrate at a great speed, driven by the interests of the people, rather than by the interests necessarily of the formal structures of government. It is a fascinating theme.

**Q162 Baroness Nicholson of Winterbourne:** Just a very quick question to Mr Arkwright. The high commissioner has elaborated clearly and constructively the formatting of the current Commonwealth strength, which is more or less based in London. My questions earlier were about outreach, strengthening the Commonwealth in the member states and collectively in the regions of the member states. Mr Arkwright, has the Foreign and Commonwealth Office sufficient capacity to support a stronger Commonwealth?

**The Chairman:** That is a question for Mr Arkwright and Caitlin Jones.

**Baroness Nicholson of Winterbourne:** Because as you so rightly said, the EU obviously starts from a different base, which is the free market. The Commonwealth began from a sharing of common values and is doing a wonderful job. But in order for common values to be continued, you have to earn a better living for example, and you have to come together more frequently to share common values and to discuss problems such as justice and prison problems but also earning a living, contracts, the IMF and so on. That surely can be progressed further only on the ground floor in the countries and in the regions. Who is going to support that? Do you have the capacity in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, or has that side got a little weak?

**Paul Arkwright:** Well, I am a new director. I have been in the job for about six weeks, and I have an excellent team, led by Caitlin, of course, in the Foreign Office, who Lord Howell and others will know, who is running the team and working very hard towards CHOGM and Sri Lanka. I would say on the question of what is being done on the ground that we are of course represented by high commissions and high commissioners on the ground in Commonwealth countries. In my experience of travel around those countries, we are very well served by the people who are there and who take the Commonwealth extremely seriously as an institution and make the most of it. I know that Caitlin wants to come in on that.

**Caitlin Jones:** If I may, Lord Chairman. The first thing I would say is that we would always like to do more, and within limited resources we do as much as we can. Under this Government the network has been strengthened, and we have seen new offices open in places around the Commonwealth, such as Hyderabad and Chandigarh, and I know that UKTI has strengthened offices in Commonwealth countries and in cities across the Commonwealth.

What I would bring out is that the work that we do on the Commonwealth is not limited to the work that my team does with high commissions in Commonwealth countries. We have a thematic approach, which means that all the work is mainstreamed throughout the FCO. We have a prosperity directorate that takes forward prosperity issues with our high commissions across the Commonwealth, and more broadly of course. Climate change issues are taken forward by a climate change team, and human rights issues are taken forward by human rights teams. We have a number of streams and strands going on that are not confined to my team; they are mainstreamed across the FCO, and a lot of valuable work goes on.

**Baroness Nicholson of Winterbourne:** So in a sense the Commonwealth gets lost in the wash. I do not mean that in destructive way at all.

**The Chairman:** Lord Janvrin desperately wants to get in. We have two more minutes.
Q163 Lord Janvrin: I have a question about trade and the Commonwealth Business Council. One of the reports I read said, I think, that inter-Commonwealth trade was rising faster than extra-Commonwealth trade. Perhaps I am straying back into the question: what is in it for Britain? My questions are these. How effective is the Commonwealth Business Council in promoting trade within the Commonwealth? Could it be more effective? Could the UK contribute in some way to using the organisation more effectively in trade terms?

Q164 The Chairman: Can I add to that a last question? Could we hear from Mozambique how the business side of things is really helped by Commonwealth membership? Let us spend the last few minutes on that.

Mr Carlos dos Santos: Thank you very much for that important question. It may be difficult to actually pinpoint the exact benefits that came directly from the Commonwealth as such, but as we in Mozambique work with the Commonwealth Business Council we benefit a lot. My President was here last year, and we organised a big round table and a lunch with businesses from the UK and elsewhere but based in London. It was a very successful meeting that generated lots of contacts with our business people from Mozambique. Subsequently, we agreed to have a forum in Mozambique. I went back to Mozambique with the Commonwealth Business Council, and we had a business conference there that again was opened by the President of the country. It has generated a lot of interest from businesses based in the UK. I have always said that people in the Commonwealth did not go to Mozambique to look for businesses only because they did not know what Mozambique had to offer. These fora provide an opportunity for them to know that they can make good business there and make a lot of money. So these kinds of interaction are happening, and I know they have happened with Ghana and other countries. Then you have the ones at summit level. Whenever we have the Heads of Government Summits (CHOGM) we also have a business forum where you have heads of state from different countries of the Commonwealth interacting with business leaders, and I think it has been a very good experience. It was good in Perth. My President has accepted the invitation to be at the business round tables again in Colombo. So quite a lot is being done, even if we do not have any other formal network that will tell you that this is a result of the work of the Commonwealth Business Council or other things combined.

The Chairman: I think we are going to make that the last word, because we have run out of time. The high commissioner has struck the final note. As they say, money is not everything but it helps. Growth and prosperity are not everything in the Commonwealth as values, but it certainly helps to have a prosperous group of nations. That is our interest and it is the interest of the whole Commonwealth. You have been marvellous witnesses. Thank you very much indeed. I am sorry that we do not have more time. We are extremely grateful to you for your insights.