



Professor Wendy Thomson CBE

28 October 2020

Stephen Twigg

By email: Stephen.Twigg@cpahq.org

Dear Stephen

Thank you for your letter of 26 October conveying the concerns of stakeholder signatories. I welcome the opportunity to discuss possible ways forward and am happy to make myself available to meet with you and a small group. My office will be touch with you to arrange a convenient time for a Teams meeting.

Can I take this opportunity however to describe the plans we already have to build on the work of ICWS and to continue to support academic discussion about the ongoing role of the Commonwealth.

We are proposing to move our work on refugee law and human rights to the School's Institute of Advanced Legal Studies, a more natural academic home that is already the base for the Refugee Law Clinic. This will provide better, more focused support to the academics currently associated with these projects. They will be able to work more easily alongside other specialists – particularly in media freedom, social justice and environmental change – ensuring a global framework for current work on the Commonwealth. This new configuration will also allow us to access Global Challenges Research Funds.

In a similar vein, we are proposing to strengthen the study of the Commonwealth's complex past – including the legacies of colonialism, empire and decolonisation, and Black British History – at the School's Institute of Historical Research (IHR). This research will be consolidated within the IHR, building on that Institute's current work with key and curating resources for research in these areas. As part of this effort, the School plans to join existing work across the School and Senate House Library – for example, work in Black History in IHR, the African Writers Series and Black British Writing initiatives in the Institute of English Studies, and library collections, all with untapped potential.

Research on the legacies of colonialism and empire will be continued at the IHR, building on its current work with key partners on the history curriculum in the UK. The Commonwealth deserves examination from multi-disciplinary perspectives, and this is better delivered through cross-School, high impact initiatives and events that make best use of the rich insights that can be drawn from across the humanities.

The ICWS's collection will continue to be housed in Senate House Library and available to international scholars. To bring visibility and focus to these issues, we plan to establish an annual Commonwealth conference to coincide with Commonwealth Day. This event will explore the cultural connections and global challenges across the Commonwealth nations. We believe the School's unique ability to draw on expertise across its disciplines – history, literature, philosophy, cultures, arts, languages, and law will provides a distinctively new interdisciplinary platform to talk about the Commonwealth and its impact on the contemporary world.

These changes are but one element of the School of Advanced Study's forward-looking strategy and positioning to meet the challenges of a changing research environment. Now more than ever, it needs to exploit opportunities for growth, harness its resources to best effect, and demonstrate that it is realising its remit as a provider of research facilitation and promotion across the humanities as defined by Research England, our principal funder. Viewed through this wider and longer lens, our strategy and proposals reflect that desire, and secure our future by strengthening our ability to successfully deliver. In developing these proposals for the future of the SAS, we have been at pains to ensure that the legacy of achievement of the ICWS and its impact on commonwealth studies is properly represented in our future. I appreciate that the loss of the ICWS institutional structure will be hugely disappointing for some, but I believe the proposals we have put forward preserve a key role for the study of the Commonwealth in the future of the School in the University.

I hope to speak to you shortly.

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Professor Wendy Thomson CBE

Yours

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "W. Thomson".

Professor Wendy Thomson

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