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<https://scolma.org/>

31 October 2020

Professor Wendy Thomson, CBE  
Vice-Chancellor, University of London  
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Dear Professor Thomson

We in SCOLMA (the UK Libraries and Archives Group on Africa) are extremely concerned to hear about plans to close the Institute of Commonwealth Studies, School of Advanced Study.

As librarians and archivists of African collections across the UK, we are all aware of the great importance of the ICWS and its collections to the African Studies field. More than this, it occupies a unique and interdisciplinary space at the intersection of Area Studies and scholarship on the British Commonwealth and empire, holding colonial and postcolonial studies in creative tension. It is also an important base for the study of Black British history in the UK.

This combining of subjects and disciplines has generated an outstandingly rich intellectual life, focused on the ever-active hub of the ICWS, which has attracted many senior scholars and gained wide international recognition. We recall, for example, many conferences and seminars (such as that which helped put Dag Hammarskjöld's death back on the agenda, and those which investigated the emerging story of the migrated archives); publications of immense importance including the *British Documents on the End of Empire* series; and projects capturing crucial first-hand accounts such as the Commonwealth Oral History Project.

The Institute's research and teaching have generated library and archives collections (now part of Senate House Library) that are extremely important in the field of African Studies. The archives include, for example, the high-profile papers of South African activist Ruth First, while the printed collections are extensive and include particularly valuable holdings of political pamphlets and ephemera as well as official publications.

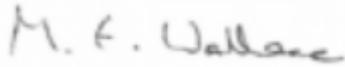
We are concerned both for preservation of and access to these collections, should the Institute close, and for the continuing acquisitions and curation necessary to keep such collections current and 'live'. Has any consideration been given to these questions? In particular, what weight can we give to assurances made now, when the collections may lack the necessary advocacy of students and scholars in the long term?

Should the ICWS close, the loss of this critical institutional base can in no way be replaced by activities planned by the Institute of Historical Research. To abolish the Institute at this time of Brexit and Black Lives Matter would seem utterly counter-productive. Similar considerations

apply to the Institute of Latin American Studies, also threatened with closure. The Commonwealth, and the world at large, will become increasingly important to the UK in future.

We therefore strongly urge you to reconsider this hasty decision to close the Institute of Commonwealth Studies.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "M. F. Wallace". The signature is written in a cursive style and is centered on the page.

(Dr) Marion Wallace  
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**Cc:**

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