

17 November 2020

Sir Richard Dearlove KCMG OBE
Chair, Board of Trustees, University of London richard.dearlove@london.ac.uk

Professor Wendy Thomson CBE Vice-Chancellor, University of London vice-chancellor@london.ac.uk

Professor Jo Fox
Acting Dean, School of Advanced Study, University of London jo.fox@sas.ac.uk

cc: sas.orgchange@sas.ac.uk

Dear Sir Richard and Professors Thomson and Fox,

As Fellows of the Institute of Commonwealth Studies (ICwS), we welcome the commitment by the University to a six-month period of consultation on the future of the Institute. We are keen to see that this will be a meaningful and inclusive exercise. A first step in securing this would be to withdraw the 18 November deadline for voluntary redundancies for ICwS staff. To keep this deadline in place might well, by undermining the viability of ICwS through loss of experienced staff, render any consultative period valueless.

Similarly, we seek assurances that the composition of any steering group, or similar, for the consultation/review will include recognised and mutually agreed experts in the field of Commonwealth studies drawn from both humanities and the social sciences. It would surely be relevant, too, for that group to include persons who can take an informed view of the outreach functions of the Institute and University in an era when the UK's position in the global community is increasingly dependent on its place in scholarly and professional networks and its ability to exercise 'soft power'.

You have seen a range of representations from a wide range of academics and Commonwealth bodies supporting continuation of ICwS. Common themes of these have been pleas for transparency in the decision process and inclusion of the Director; for transparency regarding the financial case for closure, when ICwS runs a budgetary surplus; for more sensitivity in the timing of announcements of this kind in a context where Black Lives Matter, decolonisation and the legacy of empire are at the forefront of public concern; for greater recognition of the key role played by ICwS in a policy arena of vital importance to the needs of 'global Britain', or, indeed, of awareness of the Commonwealth's role in multilateralism; for recognition of the value of the integrated and interdisciplinary work of ICwS; the value of ICwS support for Commonwealth Media Freedom principles; better appreciation of the reach and impact of ICwS events, and the exploration of alternative ways forward including mobilisation of financial support.

Our own interpretation of the large volume of responses to your intention to close ICwS is that of consensus in the submissions on the value and significance of ICwS' work which may have been better appreciated outside the University than within; and that a period of dialogue with interested parties would have been preferable to abrupt announcements and seemingly precipitate action. Now that the

University has, as we understand matters, taken the welcome decision to allow more time for reflection and consultation let us work together to find ways forward that protect and preserve the valuable asset that ICwS represents for the University, the nation, and the international community.

Friends of ICwS are ready to explore possibilities of mobilising financial support, initiatives we welcome and are ready to engage with.

We hope that you will agree to suspend the voluntary redundancy deadline, until after conclusion of the consultation period.

Yours sincerely,

Mandy Banton

Balasubramaniam Chandramohan

James Chiriyankandath

John Cowley

William Crawley

Guy Hewitt

David Killingray

James Manor

Henning Melber

Michael Ohajuru

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