

Commission on Commonwealth Studies

Office of the Secretary of the Commission
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Rt Hon Dominic Raab MP
Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs
FCDO, King Charles St, Whitehall,
Westminster, London SW1A 2AH

November 16 2020

Dear Mr Raab

Proposed Closure of the Institute of Commonwealth Studies, University of London

We are surviving members of the Commission on Commonwealth Studies, appointed by the Commonwealth Secretary-General in 1995; and we write to you as Minister responsible for exercising the United Kingdom's current responsibilities as Chair in Office of the Commonwealth.

We want to convey our acute concern at the recently announced proposal by the University of London to close the Institute of Commonwealth Studies (ICwS) in the University's School of Advanced Study. This would have adverse consequences not just for the world of scholarly enquiry, about which we have written separately to the Vice-Chancellor. It would also be potentially damaging for Commonwealth cohesion more generally. Commonwealth leaders have long recognised the link between knowledge and awareness of the Commonwealth as generated through teaching, research and publication on the one hand, and the level of public interest in and support for Commonwealth ties.

In our report published in 1996 *Learning from each other: Commonwealth studies for the 21st century* we referred (p36 of the Report) to the Institute of Commonwealth Studies as a vitally important and productive centre at that time and made frequent references to its activities and resources. In many ways ICwS has assumed even greater importance in the years since we reported: first as a platform for discussion and debate in the UK, and more widely, on Commonwealth issues following the demise of the Commonwealth Institute and the marked reduction in the capacity of the Royal Commonwealth Society; and second through taking on new teaching and research roles in relation to contemporary issues confronting the Commonwealth in human rights and refugee studies.

When we submitted our interim findings in 1995 to the Auckland CHOGM, Heads of Government strongly endorsed the Report of the Committee of the Whole which recommended that Heads recognise wider knowledge of the Commonwealth as a key strategy in furthering Commonwealth objectives and that they encourage their authorities responsible for higher education and research to promote Commonwealth studies across a wide range of topics. Following the submission of our final report in 1996, the UK-hosted CHOGM in 1997 called for the promotion of Commonwealth studies as a means to secure wider recognition by young people of the contemporary relevance and value of the Commonwealth.

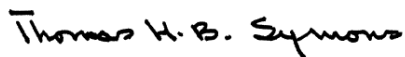
We recognise the acute financial pressure on UK academic institutions particularly because of the Covid-19 pandemic; but our understanding is that the Institute of Commonwealth Studies is in fact projected to be in surplus next academic year if enabled to survive; and that the seemingly modest savings to be achieved by redeployment of its staff and programmes are being sought largely to rescue less viable parts of the School of Advanced Study in the University of London.

With the UK again in the Commonwealth Chair in 2020, and preparing to embark on a new global strategy of its own following its exit from the European Union, the Commonwealth community looks to the UK to give a lead in strengthening Commonwealth co-operation and in promoting Commonwealth awareness. We very much hope therefore that ways will be found to enable the University of London to retain over the longer term a strong centre for study of the contemporary Commonwealth, and that support will be mobilised from public and, as appropriate, private sources to sustain the Institute over the short and medium term while a firm basis for future resourcing is worked out.

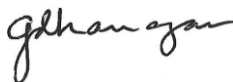
We believe that our distinguished colleague Professor Suma Chitnis from India would also wish to be associated with us in sending this letter, but it has not been possible to consult her at short notice. The ninth member of the Commission, Dr Bishnodat Persaud from Guyana, sadly passed away in 2016

Please count on our commitment and support in whatever ways might be most helpful in the quest to retain a strong centre for the study of the contemporary Commonwealth and its future wellbeing.

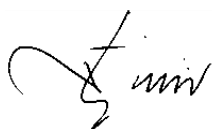
With warm good wishes



Thomas H. B. Symons, C.C., O. Ont., FRSC., LL.D., D.U., D. Litt., D.Ch. L., KSS.
Commission Chair
Chair, Association of Commonwealth Universities 1971-1972
Founding Chair, Association for Commonwealth Studies 2001-2009
Founding President and Vanier Professor Emeritus, Trent University, Canada



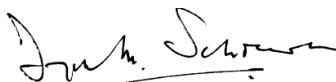
Tan Sri Gajaraj Dhanarajan
Founding Vice-Chancellor, Wawasan Open University, Malaysia 2006-2010
President, Commonwealth of Learning 1995-2004



Professor Peter H. Katjavivi, MP
Speaker of the National Assembly, Republic of Namibia
Chancellor, Namibia University of Science and Technology
Founding Vice-Chancellor, University of Namibia 1992-2003



Professor Donald Markwell, BEcon (Hons) (Qld), MA MPhil DPhil (Oxon)
Head, St Mark's College, Adelaide
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Professor Deryck M. Schreuder BA Hons (Rhodes); Rhodes Scholar and D Phil (Oxon); Hon LL D
Emeritus Vice-Chancellor, Universities of Western Australia and of Western Sydney
Formerly Professor of History, University of Sydney and
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Esi Sutherland-Addy Hon.D Litt
Associate Professor of African Studies, University of Ghana
Formerly Deputy Minister of Higher Education, Ghana, and
Board Member, Forum for African Women Educationalists



Peter R.C. Williams Hon. LL.D., OBE
Commission Member/Secretary (UK)
President Commonwealth Consortium for Education
Director of Education, Commonwealth Secretariat 1984-1994