



From the Acting Dean

Professor Jo Fox

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Dear ICWS Fellows,

I am writing to let you know about some important changes that are being proposed within the School of Advanced Study, University of London, specifically around the work of the Institute of Commonwealth Studies (ICWS).

These include the transfer of several of the Institute's key initiatives to other areas of the School and the dissolution of the Institute itself early next year. A new annual Commonwealth Day conference and witness seminars will be created. We believe these proposals will enhance the academic and public impact of work currently undertaken within the Institute and will place the study of the Commonwealth in a broader and more contemporary context.

As you know, the ICWS has from its founding in 1949 played a central role in the development of the academic study of the relationship between the peoples of the northern and southern hemispheres. The study of the Commonwealth has changed significantly since then, however, and we believe engagement with issues surrounding the Commonwealth, its past and its future, needs to change.

In particular, our work in refugee law and in human rights, in decolonisation, and in Black History deserve further investment and growth. We believe that a different configuration of the School will maximise their potential, their impact, and their reach.

The key proposals include:

- **A proposal to move our refugee law and human rights initiatives, along with their staff, 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.

We anticipate that this new configuration will allow us to develop Global Challenges Research Fund bids to ensure that our research addresses the challenges faced by developing countries. Our refugee law and human rights initiatives make critical policy interventions and represent our continued engagement with live issues affecting the Commonwealth and its future.

- **A proposal to continue the study of the Commonwealth's important and complex past at the School's Institute of Historical Research (IHR).** Research on the legacies of colonialism, empire and decolonisation will be continued at the IHR, building on its current work with key partners on decolonising the history curriculum in the UK and curating key resources for research in these areas. In particular, the IHR will invest further in Black British History, in line with its strategy launched last year.
- **The School proposes new high-impact initiatives and events that make best use of the rich insights that can be drawn from across the humanities.** The complexities and meanings of the Commonwealth deserve examination from multi-disciplinary perspectives. As part of this effort, the School will invest in a post 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 our library collections, all with untapped potential.
- **From 2021, SAS proposes to convene an annual cross-disciplinary Commonwealth conference to coincide with Commonwealth Day.** This event will draw out debates on global challenges and opportunities that face the Commonwealth, and on its historical legacy, alongside an exploration of the cultural connections between the UK and Commonwealth countries. This part of the conference will include artistic presentations and reflections on the cultural meaning of the Commonwealth.

We believe the School's unique ability to draw on expertise across its disciplines – history, literature, philosophy, cultures, arts, languages, and law -- provides a distinctively new interdisciplinary platform to talk about the Commonwealth and its impact on the contemporary world.

These proposed changes are part of a wider review of the School's work meant to enhance its national and global impact at a time of financial challenge and to further our goal of making it a National Centre for the Humanities.

The School values its Fellows and the contribution they make to its vibrant research culture. Fellowships previously attached to ICWS will be retained within the School and attached to one of the remaining institutes. You may express a preference for a specific institute based on your research interests.

Please do be back in touch if you require further information or would like to discuss your particular case.

Best wishes,
Professor Jo Fox

Professor Jo Fox FRSA FRHistS
Acting Dean and Pro Vice Chancellor (Research)