

# Commission on Commonwealth Studies

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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 21<sup>st</sup> 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.

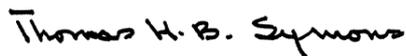
We recognise the acute financial pressure on UK academic institutions particularly because of the Covid-19 pandemic; but our understanding is that the Institute of Commonwealth Studies is in fact projected to be in surplus next academic year if enabled to survive; and that the seemingly modest savings 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.

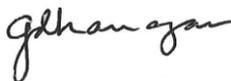
We believe that our distinguished colleague Professor Suma Chitnis from India would also wish to be associated with us in sending this letter, but it has not been possible to consult her at short notice. The ninth member of the Commission, Dr Bishnodat Persaud from Guyana, sadly passed away in 2016

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



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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  
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