

Professor Sally Mapstone FRSE
Principal and Vice-Chancellor

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5 June 2020

Rt Hon Dominic Raab MP
Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs
and First Secretary of State
House of Commons
London
SW1A 0AA

by email: dominic.raab.mp@parliament.uk

cc: Wendy Chamberlain MP
Member of Parliament for North East Fife
House of Commons
London
SW1A 0AA

by email: wendy.chamberlain.mp@parliament.uk

Dear Mr Raab,

I write as Principal and Vice-Chancellor of the University of St Andrews to urge you to ensure that the British Council receives adequate governmental support to prevent its threatened closure, thus enabling it to continue its work which is transformative for St Andrews, universities across the country, and society more widely. I write on behalf of our entire University community – both in St Andrews and around the world – when I state that the British Council is an essential agent in our society with significant benefits for the UK's economy, society, and culture; it is worthy of intervention and we ask the UK Government to ensure that the current existential threat to the Council as a consequence of the Covid-19 pandemic does not prove fatal.

Since the British Council was established in 1934, it has been a foremost representative for Britain – its culture and society – on the world stage. It has worked in over 100 countries to foster and develop cultural relations, and its continuing presence is imperative to sustain many of the partnerships it helped to create. The University of St Andrews is one such beneficiary of the British Council's work. St Andrews is a highly international University: our student body originates from 134 countries, our researchers undertake collaborative fieldwork and research on every continent, and we consistently rank as one of the top 100 universities in the world in the QS Rankings. The British Council enables or brings immense value to many of our global and world-leading activities, and its dissolution would

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significantly challenge our ability to excel internationally and to represent UK higher education and research around the world.

I can personally attest to the outstanding work the British Council undertakes: in November 2019, I was part of a British Council delegation of UK Vice-Chancellors to Russian Higher Education institutions, intending to foster Russo-UK relations, explore opportunities for study abroad and exchange schemes, and facilitate the movement of ideas, research, and academics across borders. The trip was an enormous success and a return delegation of Russian Vice-Chancellors is anticipated when international travel can resume. Such development of international partnerships – with the many social, cultural, and economic advantages they bring – will be more essential than ever in a post-Brexit landscape as the UK seeks further to establish independent international relationships.

But the British Council's impact goes way beyond any personal experience: many of my colleagues can share similar stories of how it has been transformative in their own life and professional practice, or that of their students and colleagues. Moreover without the Council, our capacity to recruit internationally and to conduct global research would be debilitated. A few examples of the ways the British Council supports the higher education sector and the University of St Andrews are these:

- **Erasmus Plus:** The British Council co-ordinates Erasmus Plus and its associated projects. It represents UK Universities to the European Commission and is supporting our immensely valuable exchange programmes through the Brexit transition, particularly by liaising with national agencies in partner countries to resolve problems over ongoing bilateral engagement.
- **Language Assistantship Programme:** This key British Council programme provides international English-language teaching opportunities to students in our School of Modern Languages. Since 2015, 228 St Andrews students have been on this programme, teaching in countries around the world – from Germany to Argentina. This programme is reciprocal, so the teaching of foreign languages in the UK is significantly enhanced by the European language assistants who teach in schools, colleges and universities in the UK. Many of the outbound students are people who have never before left the UK due to their financial circumstances; this programme is a life-changing opportunity for students from diverse backgrounds to undertake funded placements overseas and is an important widening participation initiative.
- **Research collaboration:** The British Council coordinates, delivers and promotes research funding opportunities which assist in partnership building with key regions. Examples of these schemes include the Newton Fund and bilateral strategic funding calls such as the UK-Israel Inter-University Strategic Cooperation Programme.
- **Student recruitment and market engagement:** The British Council raises awareness of UK higher education around the world and promotes the UK as a study destination of

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choice – in an age of increasing international competition for students, the importance of this cannot be overstated. The British Council is an indispensable resource to our Admissions department when they develop market engagement strategies. Additionally, the British Council provides the opportunity to realise these international recruitment strategies by brokering conversations and relationships in target markets which, subsequently, allow us to foster applications from key international markets.

The examples here detailed are just a few key headline points; in reality, the British Council is enmeshed in almost every area of our international operations and its closure would impoverish our global operations in almost every way.

For the UK's universities to thrive in a post-Brexit landscape, and as we recover from the international restrictions required to suppress the Covid-19 pandemic, the British Council will be vital in re-engaging international communities and allowing our world-leading teaching and research to flourish.

Yours sincerely,



Professor Sally Mapstone, FRSE
Principal and Vice-Chancellor