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### An advance from which British secondary education should not retreat

As organizations that bring together the regional and national associations of anthropologists throughout the world, we are deeply dismayed that the AQA Exam Board has decided to bring the A-level in Anthropology that it introduced in 2010 to a premature end (“‘This is cultural barbarism’: experts line up to decry axeing of anthropology A-level”, *The Observer*, 8 February 2015). The pioneering success of our UK colleagues in bringing anthropology into secondary education set an example that many of us hoped would be followed in our own countries.

Anthropology has become more important than ever in a globalized world in which growing economic integration has not erased cultural differences. Global in perspective but with its feet firmly on the ground when it comes to obtaining evidence, anthropology offers knowledge that helps students become well-informed and tolerant citizens in multicultural national societies and to excel in public and private sector jobs that are increasingly international in scope. Employers find anthropology graduates outstanding in areas that require sensitivity in inter-personal relations, but also for their ability to grasp the less obvious reasons why people behave in a particular way and to make constructive proposals about how organizations, including some of the world’s leading business organizations, could work better. But anthropology is not simply the cross-cultural study of human behavior and social organization. It also provides long-term perspectives on the interaction of our species with the world’s environments, providing students with the perspectives they need to think more deeply about the grand challenges of a world of mass migrations, dwindling resources and man-made climate change, global pandemics, and the often perplexing forms of violence that afflict contemporary societies. Increasing access to the kind of knowledge that anthropology provides through its inclusion in secondary schooling is not simply of benefit to those who go on to study the subject in greater depth at university, but to all members of society, whatever career they choose.

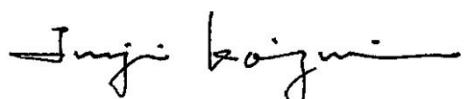
The success of anthropology in the International Baccalaureate has provided a clear demonstration of the subject’s growing appeal to young people who are offered the opportunity to study it. The AQA has simply not allowed enough time for teachers and students to discover what an A-Level in anthropology can offer. We understand the difficult economic choices that an educational charity faces as a result of the UK government’s efforts to “rationalize” A-level provision, but axing a subject whose time has truly come seems a strange choice for one of the world’s most cosmopolitan countries, whose place in the world depends crucially on its ability to deploy international “soft power”, including the excellence of its educational system. We naturally hope that other countries will appreciate the social benefits of promoting the teaching of anthropology in schools, but there is still time for Britain to remain an inspiration to others by reversing this decision.

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