



# The Association of Social Anthropologists of the UK and Commonwealth

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Dr Jarosław Gowin  
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Don'tHonourable Mr. Deputy Prime Minister,

I write as Chair of the Association of Social Anthropologists of the United Kingdom and the Commonwealth (ASA): an organization representing the professional anthropologists in 53 countries. I would like to join the voice of the ASA to that of others you have heard from internationally—the European Association of Social Anthropologists (EASA), the American Anthropological Association (AAA), the International Union of Anthropological and Ethnological Sciences (IUAES)—who regret what we understand to be a decision of the Polish government to change the way in which ‘Anthropology’ (or ‘Ethnology’) is officially recognized for purposes of funding and also of the organisation of research and teaching.

The reason for this international chorus is the respect in which Polish anthropology is held around the world, and indeed has been since the days of Bronislaw Malinowski (1884-1942) who can lay claim to being a founding father of the modern discipline. In both the ethnographic description and observation of social life and the analytical and theoretical understanding of those observations, contemporary Polish anthropology is among the best in the world.

I appreciate that ‘Anthropology’ will continue to be a subject of study at University level in Poland, and that departments named ‘Ethnology’ or Cultural Anthropology’—at the University of Warsaw, University of Łódź, Adam Mickiewicz University, Jagiellonian University, Nicholas Copernicus University, University of Szczecin, Wrocław University, and elsewhere—are not under threat. Nevertheless, I understand there to be a genuine and

reasonable fear among our Polish colleagues that the presence and importance of the subject will diminish, even be endangered, if present policies by the Polish government continue in effect. Namely, the consolidation of the discipline of Anthropology and other loosely related disciplines under the category of 'Cultural and Religious Studies'. Anthropology is the study of our humanity (from *Anthropos* (Gr.)): what makes us distinctive as a species. Anthropologists ask the broad humanistic or philosophic questions—'What is it to be human?'—but do so in the context of particular individual human lives and particular social settings. It is the comparative study of 'Man in Society'. No other discipline has this breadth: the ambition to reach between the humanities, the social sciences and the natural sciences for its answers. Categorizing Anthropology within 'Cultural and Religious Studies' may make evaluation of performance and funding more manageable, but it does so at the considerable risk of misconstruing the nature of the discipline and not doing justice to its unique intellectual contribution. The classification 'Cultural and Religious Studies' does not accord to international standards: the fear is that it will make Anthropology's distinctiveness invisible to both the public and to government administration.

It is for this reason that the ASA humbly requests that the Minister reconsider, and reinstate 'Anthropology' as a separate accredited discipline on the list of institutions, projects and individuals that might be funded.

Sincerely yours,

A photograph of a handwritten signature in black ink on a light-colored background. The signature reads "Nigel Rapport" in a cursive, slightly slanted script.

**Professor Nigel Rapport FRSE**

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