

Principal Professor Shane O'Neill  
University of Dundee

cc Lizzi Nicoll  
Director of External Relations  
University of Dundee

By e-mail

24 February 2025

Dear Professor O'Neill

**Leverhulme Research Centre for Forensic Science: University of Dundee**

I write in relation to recent media coverage suggesting that Dundee University's world-leading forensic science research centre is under threat of closure as the university attempts to respond to a significant budget deficit.

As you know, the research centre was set up in 2016 by Professor Dame Sue Black along with Prof Niamh Nic Daéid, one of the world's leading specialists in fire investigation and an expert witness at the Grenfell inquiry, who is still a director. In UK criminal justice circles, Leverhulme is widely regarded as 'the' world-leading centre of excellence to the extent that the names Leverhulme and Dundee University are entirely synonymous with each other. Accordingly, I completely concur with the view recently expressed in The Guardian by Michael Marra MSP that any decision to close Leverhulme could be interpreted as a strategic failure on the part of the University to capitalise on that excellence.

When I was appointed as Scottish Biometrics Commissioner in 2021 by the late Queen Elizabeth II on the nomination of the Scottish Parliament, I began engaging with Leverhulme on a regular basis. Accordingly, I have first hand knowledge of the outstanding international research contributions and collaborative working to modernise the scientific underpinnings of forensic evidence in court cases. I am also aware that the centre is now pioneering a drug-testing service that could impact on the significant societal challenge of drug related deaths in Scotland.

On Wednesday morning, I will be laying a report in the Scottish Parliament conducted in partnership with Leverhulme and the Scottish Police Authority which examines how DNA is used in police investigations in Scotland. Having the internationally renowned Leverhulme Research Centre as a strategic partner in work such as this gives comfort to the Parliament of the highest standards of academic rigor when making recommendations for improvements in both science and public policy.

In a meeting at the Scottish Parliament last week, I was asked about the potential closure of Leverhulme by another MSP and confirmed that I was extremely concerned to learn of the possibility that Leverhulme might be closed by the University.

Against that context, I am happy to offer the independent support of my office in any advocacy that may help Scotland to retain the world-leading research base at the Leverhulme Research Centre for Forensic Science at the University of Dundee.

Yours sincerely

*Brian Plastow*

**Dr Brian Plastow**  
**Scottish Biometrics Commissioner**