



29th April 2022

Dear Professor Purnell,

An Open Letter regarding the closure of the Modern Languages Programme at the University of the Arts, London

The Association of University Language Communities in the UK & Ireland (AULC) is the representative body for institution-wide language provision in the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland. The Language Centre at the University of the Arts in London is a member of AULC, and we are very supportive of the modern languages programme at UAL that has been in existence now for more than 40 years. We are therefore beyond dismayed to learn that the modern languages programme at UAL is being considered for closure.

We understand that this decision has been taken by your Executive Board as part of a new University Strategy. This includes your three core Guiding Policies that include the ambitions:

- *To give our students the education they need to flourish in a changing world (Guiding policy 1)*
- *To change the world through creative endeavour (Guiding policy 3).*

These are ambitions worthy of a globally leading university, and a credit to the strategy. It is therefore disappointing to say the least that such an ambitious strategy from an international University then deliberately excludes any provision to support your staff and students in their language learning needs and inter-cultural education.

As stated in your Strategy document 2022-2032, UAL is one of the world's most international universities. From analysis of demand for language learning amongst our membership of 64 UK Universities, close to half of all language learners in UKHE are non-native English speakers. Whilst the UK may sadly still be disproportionately monolingual, this is not the case in much of the rest of the world, and international students expect to be able to access language learning opportunities in our universities. We know from regular surveys of the sector that the modern languages programme at UAL is very successful, with registrations broadly rising year-on-year. This matches the increased demand for language learning amongst students across UK Universities and is only limited by Universities' investment in the resources to deliver effective institution-wide language learning programmes.

Modern languages provision at UAL has been in existence for at least 40 years. After various changes over time, the current unit is operating successfully, with increasing numbers of students, and positive financial outcomes. The opportunities for future languages provision at a leading University such as UAL, with an international workforce and student population based in the heart of a multilingual and multicultural capital city, are tremendous. It would be a catastrophe for your University and your students to be without support for language learning.

It is understood that the costs for delivery of such programmes are met within the income received by the modern languages department, and that the department is making a profit. As such, any scope for cost savings for UAL that will be made by closing a successful modern languages programme will

be minimal. As such, this proposal seems to be unnecessary, self-defeating and somewhat contemptuous in terms of its over-arching objectives. This action will do the opposite of your stated ambitions to “*expand [your] curriculum better to serve international students and meet global demand*”. The closure of modern languages sends a negative signal about the University’s commitment to the professional development of its students - especially to its higher fee-paying international students, hinders their preparation for a global employment marketplace, and structurally fails to support their attempts to demonstrate their creative endeavour to a global audience – something that is absolutely at the heart of UAL’s strategy.

In the current uncertain national and global climate, the removal of modern languages provision at UAL also flies in the face of overwhelming evidence on the need for the University sector – regionally and nationally – to help close the UK’s ‘language deficit’. The UK government estimates that £48bn or 3.5% of GDP is lost to the economy each year due to poor language skills, including the creative industries. A 2017 report from the British Academy, *Born Global*, states:

[...] as technological change and travel make the world more inter-connected, the need for people to understand diverse cultures is growing and becoming more urgent, rather than shrinking.

In addition, a recent (March 2022) report published by RAND Europe and Cambridge University has demonstrated that:

- Learning additional languages enhances human capital, with multilingual individuals potentially earning higher wages and having better labour-market outcomes.
- While English plays an important role in determining business relations worldwide, it is not the sole driver in certain sectors and other languages matter equally, if not more, in reducing barriers.
- Investing in languages education in the UK will most likely return more than the investment cost. The study estimates benefit-to-cost ratios of about 2:1 for promoting Arabic, French, Mandarin or Spanish education, meaning that spending £1 could return about £2.

The study of languages and cultures is demonstrated to improve the soft skills and personal qualities in our graduates, not only inter-cultural awareness and “a world view”, but also self-confidence, resilience, curiosity, innovation, team-working, decisiveness and a tolerance of ambiguity: in short to help imagine and create a better world, a clear stated purpose in your own Strategy. A University with international ambitions, an international work force and an international and mobile student body needs to operate as a multicultural and multilingual organisation, of which language learning is an essential component.

We the undersigned urge the Executive Board of the University of the Arts, London to reconsider the closure of your modern languages programme. This flies in the face of evidence from and about what students in Higher Education need and expect, will not make any meaningful cost savings, and will detract enormously from the stated ambitions of your new Strategy. As the relevant Learned Society for this field of activity within UKHE, AULC offers to support the modern languages programme at UAL, and your Executive Board, in developing updated plans to ensure the programme can deliver successfully according to the ambitions of the University.

Yours faithfully

Mark Critchley, Chair Association of University Language Communities in the UK & Ireland (AULC);
Director of the Centre for Foreign Language Study, Durham University

Co-signatories

1. Dr Ana de Medeiros, Vice-Chair Association of University Language Communities in the UK & Ireland (AULC); Director of the Modern Language Centre, King's College London
2. Dr Christine O'Leary, Secretary, Association of University Language Communities in the UK & Ireland (AULC)
3. Daisy Zhu, Languages Course Leader, University of Bath
4. Dr Ian Foster, Deputy Head of School (Language Teaching), School of Modern Languages, University of Bristol
5. Pascale MacFadden, Head of Modern Languages, Brunel University
6. Professor Wendy Ayres-Bennett, Principal Investigator, Promoting Language Policy, University of Cambridge
7. Jocelyn Wyburd, Director of the Language Centre, University of Cambridge
8. Dr Catherine Chabert, Reader in French, Director of Languages for All, Cardiff University
9. Sofia Anysiadou, Worldwide Centre Manager, University of Central Lancashire
10. John Worne, CEO, Chartered Institute of Linguists
11. Thomas Chaurin, Director Languages for All, University of Edinburgh
12. Dr Ángel Osle, Languages for all Coordinator, University of Essex
13. Dr Sonia Cunico, Professor of Language Teaching and Director of Language Centre, University of Exeter
14. Daniel Vallès, short courses language programme Director, University of Glasgow
15. Conrad Heyns, Director Centre for Academic Language & Literacies, Goldsmiths, University of London
16. Professor Charles Burdett, Director, Institute of Modern Languages Research
17. Nelly Mars, Deputy Director Modern Language Centre, King's College London
18. Professor Emma Cayley, Chair of the University Council for Modern Languages (UCML); Head of School of Languages, Cultures and Societies, University of Leeds
19. Dr Yolanda Cerdá, Executive Director, Language Centre, University of Leeds
20. Marina Rabadan Gómez, IWLP representative University Council for Modern Languages; Director Open Languages, University of Liverpool
21. Professor Charles Forsdick FBA, James Barrow Professor of French, University of Liverpool
22. Dr Neil McLean, Director of the Language Centre, London School of Economics & Political Science
23. Dr Orieb Masadah-Tate, Coordinator LEAP, University of Manchester
24. Sophie Guingouain, Uniwide Co-Coordinator, Manchester Metropolitan University
25. Dr Salwa Mohamed, Uniwide Co-Coordinator, Manchester Metropolitan University
26. Isabelle Ruegg Alter, Director University Wide Language Programme, Newcastle University
27. Dr Christine Leahy, Manager of the University Language Programme, Nottingham Trent University
28. Professor Neil Kenny, FBA, University of Oxford
29. Jane Sherwood, Director of the Language Centre, University of Oxford
30. Dr Chiara Cirillo, Programme Director Institution-Wide Language Programme, University of Reading
31. Amparo Lallana, Director Languages & Culture, Regent's University London
32. Laurence Richard, Director Centre for Language Study, University of Southampton
33. Laurent Semichon, Director Modern Language Teaching Centre, University of Sheffield
34. Claude Trégoat, Head of the Language Centre, University of Warwick

35. Kate Weir, Principal Lecturer in Academic Enterprise & Director Polylang, University of Westminster
36. Lucia Aiello, Coordinator Language for All, University of York