

Arts & Humanities Alliance

11 February 2024

Professor Karen Cox, Vice Chancellor
Professor Georgina Randsley de Moura, DVC Strategy and Performance
Professor Richard Reece, DVC Education and Student Experience
Professor Shane Weller, DVC Research and Innovation
Professor Juliette Pattinson, Director of Division
University of Kent

Dear Professors Cox, Randsley de Moura, Reece, Weller and Pattinson,

We write on behalf of the Arts and Humanities Alliance UK to express our dismay at news of your plans to close a wide range of Arts and Humanities disciplines including Music and Audio Technology, Art History, and the entire School of Cultures and Languages (English Language and Linguistics, Comparative Literature, Philosophy, Religion and Ethics, Modern Languages), as well as a number of other social science disciplines, with the consequent threat of compulsory redundancies for 58 members of staff across the institution.

We recognise that any decisions will not have been made lightly and that much of the volatility in the Higher Education sector for arts and humanities disciplines has been brought about by the removal of the Student Numbers Cap and a funding model for home-fees-rated students that does not allow universities to make ends meet. Responsibility for these matters lies firmly with the Government. However, even in particularly difficult financial circumstances, we would like to emphasise the value of arts and humanities disciplines to society and thus the importance of their being available for study at the nation's universities.

The University of Kent's current challenges must be set against an understanding of what the loss of these subjects will mean for the University and the communities it serves. These include substantial reductions in the capacity for generating critical thinking and creativity among the younger generation, and the total loss of opportunity for higher level education in a key range of disciplines for the diverse local demographic the University serves and a wider impoverishment of the cultural life of the area. Furthermore, all indicators point to the value of the arts and humanities to the global economy whatever the political rhetoric of the day. The World Economic Forum could not be clearer about the

skills needed for the economies of the future, the majority of which are taught on humanities programmes, with critical thinking and problem-solving – core skills in the humanities – topping the list.¹ There is also wide recognition that the arts, humanities and social sciences are needed alongside the sciences to address the human-created challenges of our time, and that an understanding of culture is the first step to change. Foremost among these challenges is AI. The importance of the humanities to address this challenge was clearly made by Andy Haldane, the former Chief Economist, Bank of England, in an interview on Sky News on 23 April 2023: ‘What will protect us from the rise of AI is our creative capacity as human beings [...] we have seen the dwindling budgets for arts and humanities [...] that is a big mistake for the jobs and skills of the future’.²

We need our university leaders to honour the contributions made every year to national economies by arts and humanities graduates. We also need our university leaders to recognise the long-term social and economic consequences of allowing decline in these subject areas. In an ever more connected world that is facing unprecedented problems, we need university leaders to embrace more, not less, multidisciplinary, and approach which teaches students ‘to analyse, interpret, create, communicate and collaborate with rigour, clarity and energy’.³ The opportunities are summed up in a recent British Academy report: ‘arts and humanities students are the “ideal entrepreneurs” of the future, digitally literate, ready to thrive in a globally diverse world, resilient, confident at analysis and team working, independently minded’.⁴

We are aware that the University of Kent actively seeks to ‘celebrate individuality and champion equality’⁵ and promotes itself as a ‘global university’ that encourages and facilitates ‘contact with different countries, cultures, and experiences.’⁶ We would hope that an institution with such aspirations will work through its current difficulties, in full recognition of the value of the arts and humanities to its mission. In particular, we call on you work together to revoke the immediacy of such changes and engage in constructive dialogue with the disciplines affected in order to develop sustainable solutions that are to the benefit of all concerned. Finally, we would be very happy to offer our support in helping think through any creative solutions to the current situation.

¹ <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2020/10/top-10-work-skills-of-tomorrow-how-long-it-takes-to-learn-them/>.

² <https://news.sky.com/video/limiting-skilled-controlled-migrant-labour-is-a-mistake-says-ex-bank-of-england-chief-economist-12864152>

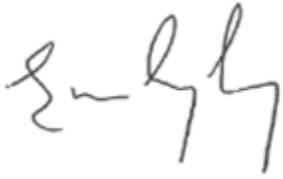
³ <https://www.thebritishacademy.ac.uk/this-is-shape/>

⁴ <https://www.thebritishacademy.ac.uk/publications/flagship-skills-right-skills-arts-humanities-social-sciences/>

⁵ <https://www.kent.ac.uk/why-kent>

⁶ <https://www.kent.ac.uk/global>

Yours sincerely,



Professors Emma Cayley and Thea Pitman
Co-chairs, Arts and Humanities Alliance

On behalf of the affiliates of the Arts and Humanities Alliance:

African Studies Association of the UK
African Theatre Association
Architectural Humanities Research Association
Association of Adaptation Studies
Association for Art History
Association of University Professors and Heads of French
British Association for American Studies
British Association for Chinese Studies
British Association for Jewish Studies
British Association for Korean Studies
British Association for Slavonic and East European Studies
British Association for the Study of Religions
British Society for the History of Science
British Philosophical Association
Council for British Archaeology
Council of University Classics Departments
Economic History Society
English Association
Henry Sweet Society for the History of Linguistic Ideas
Linguistics Association of Great Britain
National Association of Writers in Education
Oral History Society
Philological Society of Great Britain
Political Studies Association
Royal Historical Society
Royal Musical Association
Society for French Studies

Society for Neo-Latin Studies
Society for Old Testament Study
Society for the Promotion of Hellenic Studies
Society for the Promotion of Roman Studies
Standing Conference of University Drama Departments
The Folklore Society
The Mind Association
Theology and Religious Studies UK
UK Association for Language Testing and Assessment
University Archaeology UK
University English

And with thanks to Professor Jennifer Richards for research in relation to the value of arts and humanities disciplines.

<https://www.artsandhumanitiesalliance.org/>