

21 July 2026

Professor Nigel Seaton, Interim Principal and Vice-Chancellor
Professor Jeff Blackford, Vice-Principal, Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences
Members of University Court
University of Dundee

Dear Professor Seaton and Colleagues,

We write on behalf of the Arts and Humanities Alliance to express our deep concern regarding the continuing reductions in staffing and academic provision at the University of Dundee, including proposals affecting arts and humanities disciplines such as Philosophy and Languages. We understand that the University is seeking further reductions in staffing following substantial rounds of voluntary redundancies and that these measures form part of a wider restructuring programme intended to address the University's financial challenges.

We recognise the considerable challenges currently facing higher education across the UK and the difficult decisions that university leaders are increasingly required to make. At the same time, we are concerned that the scale and concentration of the proposed reductions at Dundee contribute to a pattern that is becoming a matter of growing national concern. Recent analyses by the British Academy have highlighted the loss of thousands of academic posts in the humanities, arts and social sciences, alongside the emergence of regional "cold spots" where opportunities to study strategically important subjects such as languages, classics and theology are becoming increasingly limited.¹

The circumstances at Dundee are, of course, distinctive. The University is operating under exceptionally difficult financial pressures and faces very challenging decisions about its future. However, we are concerned that reductions affecting arts and humanities disciplines risk causing

¹ British Academy, 'Loss of Academic Staff and "Cold Spots" for Humanities and Social Science Degrees Threaten Strategically Vital Skills for the UK', 15 July 2026, <https://www.thebritishacademy.ac.uk/news/loss-of-academic-staff-threatens-strategically-vital-skills-for-uk/>; Anna Bawden and Sally Weale, 'Humanities among Degrees Being "Extinguished" by Hard-Up Universities', *The Guardian*, 14 July 2026, <https://www.theguardian.com/education/2026/jul/14/university-job-cuts-humanities-social-sciences>.

long-term damage to areas of academic provision whose value extends well beyond immediate financial calculations. Disciplines now under threat, including Philosophy and Languages, contribute significantly to the University's teaching and research profile, to the intellectual diversity of Scottish higher education, and to its wider civic and cultural mission. They provide opportunities for students who may not otherwise have access to specialist provision, while public statements from staff and students have highlighted their distinctive strengths in teaching, research and community engagement. Their loss would contribute to precisely the kind of regional contraction and disciplinary "cold spots" that national bodies have recently warned against. Such developments are especially troubling at a moment when language skills, cultural understanding and critical reflection are increasingly recognised as vital to diplomacy, international engagement, national resilience and social mobility.²

The significance of these disciplines extends beyond Dundee itself. Their strengths challenge a narrative that arts and humanities provision is somehow disconnected from contemporary needs. Indeed, a growing body of commentary from across higher education, industry and public life argues precisely the opposite. Professor Evelyn Welch, incoming Chair of the Russell Group, has recently described widespread cuts to arts and humanities provision as "absolutely tragic".³ Similarly, commentators across the sector have raised concerns that humanities departments are increasingly being treated as expendable cost centres rather than as essential intellectual and cultural resources built up over decades.⁴

More broadly, the case for arts and humanities education is becoming stronger rather than weaker. As developments in artificial intelligence reshape labour markets and public discourse, employers and technology leaders increasingly emphasise the importance of the critical thinking, communication, creativity, cultural understanding and ethical judgement that humanities disciplines cultivate.⁵ These are the very qualities that enable graduates to adapt to rapidly

² Anna Bawden, "Cutting University Language Courses Puts Social Mobility at Risk, Say Experts", *The Guardian*, 5 July 2026, <https://www.theguardian.com/education/2026/jul/05/cutting-university-language-courses-puts-social-mobility-at-risk-say-experts>; British Academy, 'Loss of Academic Staff and "Cold Spots"', 15 July 2026.

³ Sally Weale, 'Florence Welch's Mother Says Cuts to Arts and Humanities Are "Absolutely Tragic"', *The Guardian*, 15 July 2026, <https://www.theguardian.com/education/2026/jul/15/prof-evelyn-welch-arts-humanities-cuts-absolutely-tragic>.

⁴ Editorial, 'The Guardian View on Humanities Cuts in Universities: Academic Departments Are More Than Cost Centres', *The Guardian*, 20 July 2026, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2026/jul/20/the-guardian-view-on-humanities-cuts-in-universities-academic-departments-are-more-than-cost-centres>; Sally Weale, "Fury over Exeter University Plan to Scrap Dozens of Humanities Posts", *The Guardian*, 1 July 2026, <https://www.theguardian.com/education/2026/jul/01/fury-exeter-university-plan-scrap-dozens-humanities-posts>.

⁵ Sharon Goldman, 'Anthropic Cofounder Daniela Amodei Says Humanities Majors Bring Critical Skills Needed in the AI Era', *Fortune*, 7 February 2026, <https://fortune.com/2026/02/07/anthropic-cofounder-daniela-amodei-humanities-majors-soft-skills-hiring-ai-stem/>.

changing environments and to contribute responsibly to society. The challenge facing universities should therefore be how to sustain such capabilities, not how to diminish them.⁶

We therefore urge the University to engage fully and constructively with affected staff and their representatives, to explore alternatives to the proposed reductions, and to consider carefully the long-term academic, social and cultural consequences of the current course of action. Recent public debate has made clear that many now see the erosion of arts and humanities provision not simply as an institutional matter but as a national one.⁷ At a time when the University is seeking to rebuild confidence in its future, preserving areas of established academic strength would send an important signal about its long-term ambitions and priorities. The University of Dundee's reputation has been built not only on scientific and professional excellence but also on its contribution to the humanities, languages and wider cultural life of Scotland. Dundee has an opportunity to demonstrate leadership by helping to chart a different course.

Yours sincerely,

The image shows two handwritten signatures in blue ink. The signature on the left is 'Emma Cayley' and the signature on the right is 'Thea Pitman'.

Professors Emma Cayley and Thea Pitman
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On behalf of the affiliates of the Arts and Humanities Alliance

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

African Studies Association of the UK
African Theatre Association
Anglo-Catalan Society
Architectural Humanities Research Association
Association of Adaptation Studies
Association for Art History

⁶ Joe Wilkins, 'Experts Warn that Critical Thinking Is Becoming More Important, Not Less, in the Age of AI', *Futurism*, 9 May 2026, <https://futurism.com/future-society/college-critical-thinking-ai>; Aaron Hanlon, Eric Hayot, and Anna Kornbluh, 'Myth and Realities about Humanities Majors', *Humanities Works*, 2026, <https://humanitiesworks.org/>; Christopher Smith, 'Why an Industrial Strategy Needs Arts and Humanities – and Why UKRI Are Funding Us to Deliver It', *Anatomies of Power*, 28 June 2026, <https://anatomiesofpower.wordpress.com/2026/06/28/why-an-industrial-strategy-needs-arts-and-humanities-and-why-ukri-are-funding-us-to-deliver-it/>.

⁷ Anna Bawden and Sally Weale, 'Humanities among Degrees Being "Extinguished"', *The Guardian*, 14 July 2026; Sally Weale, 'Florence Welch's Mother', *The Guardian*, 15 July 2026.

Association for German Studies
Association of Hispanists of Great Britain and Ireland
Association of University Professors and Heads of French
British Association for American Studies
British Association for Applied Linguistics
British Association for Canadian Studies
British Association for Chinese Studies
British and Irish Association for Jewish Studies
British Association for Slavonic and East European Studies
British Association for the Study of Religions
British Society for Middle Eastern Studies
British Philosophical Association
Council for British Archaeology
Council of University Classics Departments
Drama HE
Economic History Society
English Association
Henry Sweet Society for the History of Linguistic Ideas
History UK
Linguistics Association of Great Britain
Media, Communication, and Cultural Studies Association
Music Mark – the UK Association for Music Education
National Association of Writers in Education
Oral History Society
Political Studies Association
Royal Geographical Society
Royal Historical Society
Royal Photographic Society
Royal Musical Association
Society for the Promotion of Byzantine Studies
Society for French Studies
Society for Italian Studies
Society for Latin American 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
The Folklore Society
Theology and Religious Studies UK
TROPO UK: The Association of Teachers and Researchers of Portuguese Language in the UK
UK Association for Language Testing and Assessment
UK Council of Area Studies Associations

University Archaeology UK

University Council For Languages

University English

Women in Spanish, Portuguese and Latin American Studies