

21 July 2026

Professor Lisa Roberts, President and Vice-Chancellor
Professor Dan Charman, Senior Vice-President and Provost
Mr Mike Shore-Nye, Senior Vice-President and Registrar and Secretary
Mr Quentin Woodley, Pro-Chancellor and Chair of Council
Professor Gareth Stansfield, Pro-Vice-Chancellor and Executive Dean
Professor Helen Berry, Deputy Pro-Vice-Chancellor, HASS
Professor Adam Watt, Deputy Pro-Vice-Chancellor, HASS

Dear Professor Roberts and colleagues,

We write on behalf of the Arts and Humanities Alliance to express our deep concern regarding the proposed redundancies and reductions affecting arts and humanities disciplines at the University of Exeter, including Languages, Cultures and Visual Studies, History, English and Creative Writing, Social and Political Sciences, Philosophy and Anthropology, Classics, Ancient History, Religion and Theology, and Arab and Islamic Studies. We understand that more than 500 staff have been placed at risk and that the University is seeking to reduce staffing by 153 FTE posts.

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 Exeter 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

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>.

The information available suggests that a number of the areas affected at Exeter are performing strongly by the measures universities themselves typically value. Within Languages, Cultures and Visual Studies, student recruitment remains robust, Modern Languages and Art History and Visual Culture have met recruitment targets, the Language Centre has experienced growing enrolments, and departmental teaching quality and student satisfaction compare favourably with University and Faculty averages. Research performance is similarly impressive, encompassing major grant capture, prestigious fellowships, international collaborations and significant contributions to Exeter's wider reputation.

These strengths matter because they 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”.² 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.³

We are particularly concerned by the proposal to close the Language Centre in Penryn, which would remove an important centre of language learning in Cornwall and risk creating precisely the kind of regional cold spot that national bodies have recently warned against. Such developments are especially troubling at a moment when language skills are increasingly recognised as vital to diplomacy, international engagement, national resilience and social mobility.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 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>.

³ 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>.

⁴ 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.

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 Exeter 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
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

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.

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