

7th July 2026

Dear Professor Lisa Roberts,

I am writing to express my profound concern regarding the University of Exeter's announcement that up to 500 jobs are at risk of redundancy, including the proposed loss of 153 FTE posts. We understand that of the 86 colleagues across Modern Languages, the Language Centre, and Art History and Visual Culture (AHVC), 72 have been placed at risk, with between 15 and 25 posts expected to be lost, alongside a further two posts following the proposed closure of the Language Centre in Penryn.

As President of the Association of Hispanists of Great Britain and Ireland, the professional association representing academics and researchers in Hispanic and Lusophone Studies across Great Britain and Ireland, I am particularly concerned by the threatened loss of expertise in Spanish, Latin American Studies and Portuguese at Exeter and the devastating impact these proposals would have on our valued colleagues. We recognise the recruitment challenges facing Modern Languages nationally. However, these challenges call for strategic investment and long-term planning, not the dismantling of well-established, high-performing programmes. At a time when multilingualism and intercultural understanding are increasingly essential in an interconnected world, reducing language provision would be profoundly short-sighted.

The University of Exeter has established itself as an outstanding provider of Spanish and Portuguese within its Modern Languages programme, while these languages also form an integral part of the University's Language Centre. Student recruitment in Modern Languages has recovered following the post-Brexit downturn, supported by successful outreach initiatives such as the Adopt-a-School Scheme and the Languages for All programme, for which Exeter serves as the regional hub. Modern Languages met its recruitment targets in 2025, demonstrating renewed student demand and the effectiveness of these initiatives. Looking ahead, the anticipated return of Erasmus+ participation is likely to make language degrees even more attractive to prospective students.

These achievements are reflected in national and international rankings. All language subjects are ranked within the top 15 nationally in the Complete University Guide 2027. Exeter also achieved its highest-ever position in the QS World University Rankings this year, placing 136th globally, with Arts and Humanities ranked among the world's top 100 subjects and Languages placed within the 101-150 band internationally.

The departments under threat also make substantial contributions to teaching excellence. The Language, Cultures and Visual Studies (LCVS) department recorded National Student Survey scores of 82.7%. Staff serve as external examiners across the sector, hold Higher Education Academy accreditation, and have received University Staff Guild Teaching Awards in recognition of their outstanding educational contributions.

The research profile of these disciplines is equally impressive. In REF 2021, 39% of outputs were judged world-leading (4*) and a further 44% internationally excellent (3*). Around one-third of colleagues currently hold active research grants, while a similar proportion have recently submitted grant applications, demonstrating a vibrant and expanding research culture. Since 2018, colleagues have secured major external funding from prestigious national and international bodies. Awards include AHRC Research and Development grants in both Hispanic Studies and Art History and Visual Culture, an SSHRC grant in Hispanic Studies, a Leverhulme Early Career Fellowship in Portuguese, four British Academy Small Research Grants in Hispanic Studies, and AHRC Impact Accelerator funding supporting colleagues in both Hispanic Studies and Portuguese.

One colleague in Hispanic Studies is Co-Investigator on the SSHRC Partnership Grant, valued at CA\$2.1 million, for the 2025-2032 project *Confluence of Religious Cultures in Medieval Historiography: A Digital Edition of the General e Grand Estoria (DEGE)*, led by the University of British Columbia Okanagan. As Canada's largest research funding scheme, SSHRC Partnership Grants are exceptionally competitive and are only rarely awarded to Humanities projects. Through this project, the Exeter colleague will coordinate the training of 98 undergraduate and Master's interns and eight doctoral students across 18 partner institutions in seven countries, including Tunisia, Egypt and Colombia. The funding allocated to Exeter supports annual student internship opportunities and significantly enhances the University's international research profile.

Colleagues in Hispanic Studies also occupy positions of international distinction. They serve on editorial boards and major Spanish-language book series, sit on prestigious prize juries, and have received significant scholarly honours. One colleague was recently elected to the Institut d'Estudis Catalans, the Catalan national academy, a lifetime distinction recognising exceptional academic achievement. Two colleagues direct and produce the internationally acclaimed CARTASVIVAS project, a pioneering feminist audiovisual archive widely used by both academic and public audiences. In 2025, colleagues hosted the Women in Spanish and Portuguese Studies conference, and members of the department have received prestigious research prizes, including the Tom Sharpe Literature Prize.

Portuguese Studies has similarly established an outstanding international reputation. A colleague will join the senior research team of the recently funded project *Convergence and Divergence between National Varieties of Portuguese*, led by Professor Augusto Soares da Silva at the Portuguese Catholic University and funded by the Portuguese Foundation for Science and Technology (FCT). This three-year international collaboration will examine the relationships between the four national varieties of Portuguese, the development of African Portuguese varieties and the increasing pluricentricity of the language, producing an edited volume, workshop and international conference. Another colleague is leading Exeter's participation in the Global Classrooms initiative, engaging students in collaborative research on artificial intelligence and its use within Brazilian favelas.

The Language Centre is itself a highly respected centre of excellence. It provides internationally recognised accredited examinations in French, Spanish and Italian, qualifications valued by employers, universities and governments worldwide. Many of its staff are accredited examiners with distinguished scholarly profiles, serving as external examiners for other universities while holding doctorates and Senior Fellowships of the Higher Education Academy. Enrolment at the Language Centre remains exceptionally strong. Current recruitment figures are comparable with its best historical performance and have increased in each of the past two years, attracting substantial numbers of both home and international students. The Centre delivers language teaching across a wide range of languages and proficiency levels, serving students from every discipline across the University. It has long been one of Exeter's distinctive strengths and an important attraction for students wishing to complement their primary degree with language study.

Taken together, these achievements demonstrate that the disciplines currently under threat are not areas of decline but vibrant, internationally recognised centres of excellence in teaching, research, student experience and public engagement. The proposed redundancies therefore risk causing lasting damage not only to the individuals affected but also to the University's academic reputation, international standing, research capacity and future competitiveness.

We therefore urge the University to reconsider these proposals and to work constructively with staff and their representatives to identify sustainable alternatives that preserve the exceptional strengths of Modern Languages, the Language Centre, and Art History and Visual Culture. Protecting these disciplines is an investment in the University's future and in its continued contribution to education, research and international collaboration.

Yours faithfully,



Sarah Wright

President of the Association of Hispanists of Great Britain and Ireland (AHGBI)