



Association of Hispanists of Great Britain and Ireland

Vice-Chancellor,
Cardiff University

9 February 2025

Dear Professor Lerner

I am writing in my capacity as President of the Association of Hispanists of Great Britain and Ireland (AHGBI), one of the major Modern Language Associations in the UK, and on behalf of the members and the academic community I represent, to express our concern at the threat to Modern Languages and related studies at the University of Cardiff. I understand that the proposal is to make 400 staff redundant across the university over the next few years and for the School of Modern Languages to cease to exist and all modern foreign language and translation programmes to disappear.

I would like to voice my strongest concerns on behalf of the AHGBI against this move, and the potential threat to Modern Languages. The School of Modern Languages at Cardiff University has a very strong reputation nationally and internationally.

As an association representing Hispanic Studies across the UK and Ireland, we are strongly opposed to the threat to provision and staffing in Spanish, Portuguese and Latin American Studies in particular. Cardiff University is the largest provider of Modern Languages degrees in Wales, providing degrees, teaching and researching in seven languages, including Spanish and Portuguese, and Translation Studies in Wales. Cardiff Modern Languages accounts for over 60% of the undergraduate intake to degrees in Modern Languages, Translation and related joint honours programs in Wales (figures from 2024), graduating over 150 students per year. I am concerned that if Cardiff University ceases all Modern Languages degree provision, a 'cold spot' for Modern Languages degree provision will emerge in South and Southeast Wales, disabling students from studying languages in Wales and narrowing provision for Welsh and UK students.

Cardiff Modern Languages makes sector-leading interventions to support the teaching of Modern Languages in schools in Wales, having worked with over 80% of secondary schools in Wales through the MFL Mentoring project to support the roll out of the new Curriculum for Wales, a radical reform of education in Wales. Closing all Modern Language degree programs at Cardiff would be at odds with the Welsh Government's Programme for Government commitment to Modern Foreign Languages (2021-26); its £7m investment in the Global Futures strategy for international languages (2015-26); and its International Strategy pledge to support the language skills of young people as part of its global responsibility (2021-26). The cessation of Modern Languages at Cardiff would result in no degree level provision in German in Higher Education in the Cardiff and South Wales area. (Germany is Wales's second largest export market) and no degree level

provision of Japanese and Portuguese in Wales. Cardiff Modern Languages are a centre of excellence for research, placed 14 out of 47 academic units of Modern Languages units in the UK's Research Excellence Framework exercise in 2021, with noted strengths in impact (applied research), rated as world-leading (4*). The closure of Modern Languages would significantly diminish the research base and infrastructure for Humanities research in Wales. The proposed School of Global Humanities represents an exciting new initiative for Cardiff but is not a credible proposition without the inclusion of Modern Languages.

I also would like to raise our objections to the strategic short-sightedness of such a move in the current UK context. Foreign language skills, combined with a high level of intercultural competence, are in demand as never before, and it is a well-known fact that the UK seriously under-performs in this area in comparison to other European countries, with detrimental effect on the competitiveness of business, on economic prosperity, and on our international standing. The case has been compellingly argued by employers via the CBI's annual survey, year on year, since 2010, and linguists and cross-cultural experts are urgently needed nationally and internationally, now more than ever. Although the financial challenges that the University of Cardiff is facing are well-documented, making colleagues in strategic areas of strength such as Modern Languages bear the brunt of decisions made elsewhere is not an ethical or appropriate solution. If the University of Cardiff continues with its plans for reduction across Modern Languages and related areas, it will do its region and the UK more widely a very great disservice, sending a powerful and ill-timed signal about the value of European languages and cultures within Britain and of their global significance.

The Association of Hispanists offers our strongest support to our colleagues in Modern Languages and Translation Studies at Cardiff for the reasons stated above. On behalf of the members of the AHGBI and the broader academic community we represent, I urge you to reflect upon the longer-term implications of your current review, and I look forward to hearing your response.

Yours sincerely,



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