



21 November 2025

Dear Jane Norman, Sam Kingman and Members of Council,

We are writing to express our strong opposition to the decision to suspend applications to all language degree programmes, a move that appears intended to lead to the permanent closure of all undergraduate language degrees at the University of Nottingham. Under these proposals, students would no longer be able to study any modern language to degree level at the University—or indeed anywhere in the East Midlands. While we recognise that the University, like many others in the UK, faces financial pressures, eliminating all language degrees is not an acceptable or constructive solution.

Languages are essential to the UK's economic strength, social wellbeing, and national security, as demonstrated by *The Economic Value to the UK of Speaking Other Languages* (2022) and the British Academy's *Born Global* report (2016). If language degrees are removed from the University of Nottingham, the East Midlands will become a significant "cold spot" for language education. The region already ranks highly for educational deprivation; this decision will deepen that disadvantage. It would damage the pipeline of future language teachers, make it even harder to sustain language teaching in local schools, and limit opportunities for pupils in the region. This is fundamentally a question of social justice. Moreover, students who prefer or need to study close to home will have no access to degree-level language study, undermining the University's local and regional civic responsibilities and contradicting its own Civic Strategic Delivery Plan.

As a comprehensive, research-intensive institution with a long-standing commitment to the Arts and Humanities, the University of Nottingham has included languages at its core since its foundation in 1881. Removing all language degrees would make Nottingham the

only Russell Group university without any modern languages provision in its Arts and Humanities portfolio, damaging its academic reputation and national standing.

As Learned Societies representing Spanish, Luso-Brazilian, and Latin American Studies, we are particularly dismayed by the proposal to suspend degrees in Spanish, Portuguese, and Latin American Studies—areas in which the University has long excelled. The original Department of Spanish, founded in 1954, expanded in 1978 to include Spanish American studies and Portuguese language and literature. Today, the Section of Spanish, Portuguese and Latin American Studies welcomes over 100 students each year. Most study post-A Level Spanish, while many others join via the Beginners' pathway. All students of Portuguese begin as Beginners, making Nottingham one of very few UK universities offering this full pathway from scratch to degree level.

The Section's academic expertise spans Spanish, Portuguese, Spanish American, Brazilian, and Lusophone African culture, literature, art, film, history, politics, and intellectual history—ranging from the early modern period to the present day, across two languages and three continents. This breadth and depth are unique outside London and Oxbridge. The Section has educated generations of undergraduate and postgraduate students who have gone on to careers in education, business, diplomacy, and many other fields, equipped with vital linguistic abilities and intercultural understanding. These are precisely the skills that the University now appears willing to discard—a deeply troubling stance in an increasingly divided world.

Spanish, Portuguese and Latin American Studies at Nottingham has long been recognised as one of the top departments in the country, delivering world-class teaching not only in languages but also in history, politics, film and visual culture, literature, and popular culture. Some of our members have served as Undergraduate External Examiners for the department, giving us first-hand insight into the outstanding quality of the programmes in Spanish, Portuguese, and Latin American Studies. The department is also a leading research centre with an exceptional record in REF. In the latest national Research Excellence Framework (REF) exercise in 2021, the Department ranked sixth out of 47 units, and third among the 25 universities in the elite Russell Group. As leader of the Midlands⁴ Cities consortium, Nottingham's academics in Arts and Humanities, including colleagues in all languages, have played a major role in PhD education across the region.

The decision to withdraw Modern Languages degree courses from UCAS ahead of the Council meeting on 25 November is deeply troubling. By removing these programmes from

the current admissions cycle, the University is effectively pre-empting the outcome of the closure decision. Should the Council formally approve the closure of Modern Languages, the long-term consequences will be significant and far-reaching.

The proposals are also incompatible with the University's ambition to present itself as a global institution. The University's Strategy outlines a vision of being "a university without borders," committed to addressing local and global challenges. Eliminating modern language degrees contradicts this mission and reflects a narrow, inward-facing approach rather than a truly international outlook.

We strongly urge you to reconsider this decision.

Yours faithfully,

Professor Sarah Wright (Association of Hispanists of Great Britain and Ireland)

Professor Alison Ribeiro de Menezes (Women in Spanish and Portuguese Studies)