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Professor Koen Lamberts  
Vice Chancellor, The University of Sheffield  
Firth Court, Western Bank  
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11 May, 2021

Dear Vice-Chancellor,

The undersigned are writing to you to request the immediate suspension of the 'Future of Languages' initiative, and to introduce a truly consultative process which involves the entire staff and student body, to determine what is best for all languages at the University of Sheffield.

We are concerned and disturbed that a decision of such a significant scale was not made with the proper consultation of all groups impacted by it. We want to emphasise that consulting one member from a department does not constitute proper consultation of a work area. Staff across academic and professional services roles have valuable inputs to make on a change with such wide reaching impacts. Neglecting such consultation is not only short sighted, it points to a serious deficit in the transparency of university operations.

The proposed restructure impacts not only the staff who are officially within scope, but also the wider university community who should have been included in the consultation:

- The School of East Asian Studies, who are identified as part of the 'Future of Languages' programme, but were not consulted in developing the FoL plan.
- Staff in the Modern Language Teaching Centre, whose workload and general working conditions will be directly impacted, but were not consulted at large about the FoL plan.
- The eight departments which offer dual degrees with the School of Languages and Cultures (and SEAS): Archaeology, Economics, English, History, Management, Music, Philosophy, and Politics. These dual degrees are directly placed at risk by this short-sighted decision, yet none of these departments were consulted in developing the FoL plan.
- The four departments which offer a total of 14 single honours degrees with the School of Languages and Cultures and Modern Language Teaching Centre: Electronic and Electrical Engineering, Mathematics, Materials Science and Engineering, and Mechanical Engineering. These degrees are also placed at risk, yet none of these departments were consulted in developing the FoL plan.
- Directors of language area studies within the School of Languages and Cultures, who were not consulted in developing the FoL plan.

- Professional Services staff in SLC who are currently working under interim measures and face an uncertain foreseeable future.
- The central admissions teams for the faculty, who have expertise on the impact of degree choice on prospective student conversion, but were not consulted in developing the FoL plan.
- The student body, both those on SLC single or dual honours programmes, and those who take language classes within the department. This includes UG, PGT, and PGR students, who were not, as far as we are aware, consulted in the formation of the FoL plan.

We are even more disturbed that fundamental concerns about the impact of this restructure raised by large numbers of staff have been summarily dismissed by faculty and university leadership. Actively ignoring the concerns of staff risks causing serious injury to teaching provision and research communities in this university, which could be avoided.

We reiterate some of these concerns, and ask that they receive considered attention rather than reflexive dismissal:

- Both degree bearing and non-degree bearing language provision are fundamentally important, and there is a great deal of collaboration between the two work areas, but they cannot be delivered through a singular language offer, and to attempt to do so would undermine both student language attainment and the strong research-led teaching expected of a Russell Group university.
- The proposed plan is at cross purposes with the stated aims of the National Languages Strategy (2020) goal of “Stopping the decline across the UK as a whole in the numbers of undergraduates studying languages to degree level by 2025, and, following a period of levelling, sustaining an increase in numbers from 2030.”
- Removing academic language teaching from SLC will marginalise and erase minority languages such as Catalan, Dutch and Luxembourgish as living cultural and historical disciplines.
- This instrumental and utilitarian approach to modern languages constitutes a destructive assault on the idea of the university, and damages the very core of the idea of the arts and humanities. It risks destroying the capacity to deliver modern languages and cultures as a set of joined-up academic disciplines.
- It is our view that the ‘Future of Languages’ proposal was generated in a damagingly secret way, with perfunctory (at best) consultation of staff and student interests, and distressingly little reference to the long history and important pedagogical and policy developments in language and language-based area studies.
- You are pursuing this programme during a time of challenge that you yourself have acknowledged to be unprecedented. The stress and anxiety caused shows a lack of consideration and care for the well-being of colleagues and students.

We fervently ask you to reconsider, and immediately suspend this programme, in favour of genuine consultation on a shared future of languages at this university.

Signed,

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