

# UCML

UNIVERSITY COUNCIL  
OF MODERN LANGUAGES

26 April 2021

Dear Professor Cameron,

As the Chair of the University Council of Modern Languages, I am writing on behalf of our member organisations across the UK sector to urge you to reconsider the proposed closure of the Department of History, Languages and Translation.

The Department's contributions to languages outreach are nationally recognised and reflect Aston's widening participation and community engagement ethos. Aston has been a valued member of the Routes into Languages widening participation network, and over the last five years alone has reached more than 15,000 students in 455 schools in the West Midlands through this programme. The Learning through Languages UK consortium of universities, cultural associations, lobbyists and teachers has also made a significant contribution to supporting increased uptake in languages as well as raising achievement levels across all subjects in schools through bilingual education, providing teacher training during lockdown in Content- and Language-Integrated Learning through a series of monthly seminars (CLIL Mondays).

The Department has also made significant contributions to the wider community through projects including the Birmingham City Council- and British Academy-funded initiative to improve public health in minority communities in East Birmingham. These projects supported work on removing language barriers for important public health information. In addition, it has planned a re-launch of Languages for All that would incorporate community languages such as Urdu, Punjabi and Arabic to serve businesses in the Midlands. Recent research by Aston Business School reveals that SMEs making use of language capabilities are 30% more successful in exporting than those who do not. The MA in Translation for Business and International Organisations was recently commended as an 'industry-leading course' in terms of 'civic responsibility, community engagement and strong community of practice'. Moreover, the Department supports internationalisation through a Global Challenges Research Fund project developing treatment for Alzheimer's disease in Latin America. Plans to stop all activities associated with the Department would impact perceptions of Aston by its international partners at a time when intercultural understanding and working is highly valued.

Finally, the proposal to close the Department flies in the face of the University's REF submission to UoA 26 Modern Languages and Linguistics. It undermines the Unit environment statement and has reputational impact. Closing the Department also undermines confidence in the broader institutional commitment to research excellence and innovation.

I write to express our deep concerns about the proposed closure. I am happy to meet to discuss how UCML can support Aston University to reconsider this proposal.

Yours sincerely,

Professor Claire Gorrara (Chair), on behalf of the University Council of Modern Languages