

Vice-Chancellor
Professor Koen Lamberts
University of Sheffield

Vice-President and Head of the Faculty of Arts and Humanities
Professor Susan Fitzmaurice
University of Sheffield

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british association for slavonic
and east european studies

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Dr Matthias Neumann
President of BASEES
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School of History
University of East Anglia
Norwich, NR47TJ
United Kingdom

Norwich, 19/05/2021

Dear Professor Lamberts and Professor Fitzmaurice,

I am writing to you, as President of the British Association for Slavonic and East European Studies, to express my Association's grave concerns about the 'Languages at Sheffield' initiative that threatens to significantly reduce and devalue the language teaching at the University of Sheffield.

The UK government has repeatedly acknowledged that the national interest requires high levels of expertise in modern foreign languages, including Russian language and Russian studies. The importance of the Russian Federation in contemporary global geopolitics has been re-emphasised over the past years and the UK's ability to deal effectively with the Russian Federation needs continuing investment in the teaching of Russian language and Russian studies more generally at UK universities. Whilst we acknowledge the challenges universities face in attracting students for MFL degree courses, we strongly believe that the good reputation the University of Sheffield has for Russian language and cultural studies is, in fact, an excellent basis for expanding the recruitment of students. The de-specialisation of language teaching and its separation from teaching of literature, cultural studies, history, translation, and linguistics are short-sighted, particularly as the United Kingdom is embarking on its 'Global Britain' post-Brexit strategy, and are set to undermine the integrity of not only the discipline but also one of the leading departments in the country. The experience of other universities has shown that investment into specialised language teaching, i.e. maintaining high standards of language teaching as an integral part of a "Languages and Cultures" department's work in teaching, scholarship, and research will lead to a growth of student numbers in a highly challenging and competitive market.

The British Association for Slavonic and East European Studies fully understands that the rapidly changing environment in higher education requires institutions to continuously evolve and adapt and this may necessitate difficult structural changes. However, we believe that the medium and long-term implications of the current proposal to move all language teaching into the university's Modern Languages Teaching Centre have not been properly assessed. The restructuring proposal is misguided and fails to recognise the contribution that the scholars of the School of Languages and Cultures have made to their respective fields over many years. We urge you to pause the process so that genuine consultation can take place to ensure the continuing quality of the undergraduate programme in Russian and Slavonic Studies. The Association would be pleased to participate in this consultation.

Sincerely,



Dr Matthias Neumann
President of the British Association for Slavonic and East European Studies