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Cc Professor Damien Walford Davies, Provost and Deputy Vice Chancellor

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Dear Professor Larnier, Dear Professor Walford Davies

### **Open Letter. Proposed Cuts at the University of Cardiff**

On behalf of the Executive Committee and Members of the Association of University Professors and Heads of French+, I am writing this open letter as President to express our grave concern regarding the proposed cuts to Modern Languages at Cardiff University and to other subjects. Such radical cuts in language provision will do direct harm to the lives and career prospects of young people and students in Wales; to economic and social stability at local, regional and national levels; to Welsh government strategies in various areas including global engagement and youth mobility; and to the enhanced outcomes of multilingual, multicultural research compared to monolingual approaches. We are also dismayed at the way in which the cuts have been put together and announced, which has already caused huge reputational and human damage.

I understand that the proposed new School of Global Humanities will not offer languages degrees, which is self-evidently an absurd proposition. I restate the Association's fundamental position that a University that does not offer students the opportunity to study and explore other languages and cultures is not truly global. Indeed, in the same way as an institution that withdrew mathematics or history, a University that does not offer language degree programmes cannot properly call itself a University. Nor could such an institution figure credibly within the sector's aspirations to international leadership.

I have heard Cardiff colleagues speak about the proposals to collected subject associations on two separate occasions. I am sorry to say that both times there was a yawning gap between the impressive clarity and coherence with which our Cardiff colleagues spoke, on the one hand, and the lack of detail, care, and constructive thinking in the University proposals, on the other. Whatever future moves are made, the Cardiff proposals repeat an all-too familiar scenario in which the willingness of senior managers to announce 'difficult decisions' seems to have been mistaken for leadership. As I have stated in open letters to management groups at other Universities, publishing dramatic, unclear proposals for closing degrees and putting staff at risk of redundancy is violence. From one institution to another, this may or may not be a fully conscious part of the management approach, but either way plans such as these hurt people in ways seen and unseen. Some may stop looking after themselves and have accidents or hurt themselves because they are distracted, anxious, scared, despondent or upset. Some will experience difficulty or breakdown in their relationships with colleagues, families and friends. Some will show no outward sign of upset at the time, and will confide afterwards that they will never fully recover.

Some will have already become ill, potentially exacerbating existing personal circumstances, and some will become ill in the short term or long term. While these general consequences are readily predictable, exactly how they manifest themselves, and to what degree of severity, is not.

The challenges to UK Higher Education are of course acute. All the more need for senior leaders to work collaboratively and constructively with staff and students on solutions, and for senior staff to bring the creativity and support that staff and students expect of their leaders.

The summary position set out by the [University Council for Modern Languages](#) makes clear the scale of the impact represented by the proposed cuts.

For French specifically, a sense of the risks of the current plans – and of the opportunities for future development – can be gained from the Welsh Government website dedicated to the 2023 Wales in France initiative, which celebrated the extensive cultural, business and sporting links between the two countries: ‘France is one of our closest neighbours and an important partner as we reaffirm Wales’s position as an outward looking, European nation and continue to strengthen our relationships with European nations, regions and organisations. France is an economic powerhouse for Wales [with] around 80 French-owned businesses in Wales employing about 10,120 people. In 2020, Welsh exports to France were valued at just over £1.836bn making it our second largest export destination.’

Speaking in a German context, Willy Brandt’s famous line about language and trade expresses a well-established general principle that supports such economic ties: ‘If I am selling to you, I speak your language. If I am buying, dann müssen Sie Deutsch sprechen.’ The withdrawal of French degree programmes by the largest provider in Wales puts economic and cultural activity with France seriously at risk, along with the long-standing relationship between the two countries recognised by Mark Drakeford in Paris as First Minister at the time of the Wales in France celebrations: ‘Our interconnected histories go back over centuries, and our interconnected cultures bind us together over those long years.’

By aspiring to global engagement without degree-level languages, the Cardiff proposals envisage a monolingual world dramatically at odds with reality. Only 6% of the global population speak English as a first language, for instance, and around 75% do not speak English at all. Rather than aligning with post-Brexit isolationism by hunkering down only with the 6%, a properly multilingual School of Global Humanities that trains students to degree-level competence in languages and cultures – and which is rooted in interdisciplinary research, not simply a ‘service’ unit for language-only courses – is a crucial asset for a University that aspires to be ‘an anchor institution in our city-region, delivering cultural, social, economic and environmental benefit for Cardiff, Wales and the world’. The University’s strategy aspires to ‘generating new knowledge that tackles the big challenges, co-creating solutions with global and local communities’. It is axiomatic that knowledge generated and tested only in one language or culture is less effective at tackling major challenges than research that works across linguistic and cultural contexts. Global solutions co-created only in one language are not co-created or global at all, and are therefore probably not solutions either.

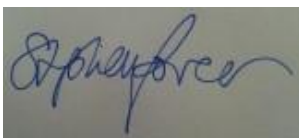
As a degree subject today, French and Francophone Studies is a huge and exciting area of study that encompasses the 29 countries where French is an official language, and which by definition opens onto extraordinary cultural and linguistic richness as well as major aspects of human history and contemporary affairs including local and global challenges. At the level of research,

the Agence Universitaire de la Francophonie brings together over 1,000 Francophone higher education and research institutions, based in 120 different countries around the world. The scale of the non-Anglophone world is larger than many people may think. If we want to live in a more stable, equitable and sustainable society based on education and research as fundamentals of the HE mission, then we need to find ways of engaging meaningfully with that world. As a Russell Group institution in a capital city supported by bold international aims at Welsh government level, and with existing research excellence in languages and an MFL Mentoring programme admired by colleagues up and down the UK, Cardiff has the basis for a positive set of plans co-developed by staff, students, and a supportive, creative leadership team.

For nearly 80 years now the AUPHF+ has promoted the study of French at University level, and although there is much hostility in the UK to multiculturalism it is not the case that languages will simply die off. On the contrary, in Wales alone up to 100 different languages are spoken, perhaps more, and many businesses and employers reap the benefits (financial, reputational, staff opportunities) of working multilingually. There are huge advantages to education systems and workforces that have serious capacity in linguistic and intercultural skills, be that in terms of individual and collective mobility and prosperity, economic growth and investment opportunities, social cohesion, health and well-being, environmental protection, decarbonising and a full and just transition to green energy, humanitarianism, international relations, and so on (indicatively, see [‘Investment in Languages Education Could Return Double for UK Economy’](#) by Wendy Ayres-Bennett et al). The central importance of languages to research and international priorities generally has also been noted in statements by STEM Royal Societies and Academies.

It is admirable that in the face of existential threat staff at Cardiff have made clear their interest in working with the University on a new School for Global Humanities. I urge you to use this opportunity to work with staff and students, and to put future proposals on a new footing that not only recognises the harm that will be done by cutting languages programmes but which focuses on the massive positive potential for individual and collective opportunity – including the fundamental strategic aims of the institution – through a serious, supportive and collaboratively produced plan for languages and cultures.

Yours sincerely



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