



Association for
German Studies in
Great Britain and Ireland



13 February 2026

FAO: Principal Professor Richard Williams

Cc: Mr. Bruce Pritchard, Chair of Court

Dear Professor Williams,

As President of the Association for German Studies of Great Britain and Ireland (AGS), Chair of Women in German Studies (W+IGS) and President of the German Language Association (GLA), we are writing on behalf of our members to express our concern about the proposed staff cuts to the Department of Languages and Intercultural Studies, and in particular the threat to close German and Chinese. We are, of course, acutely aware of the multiple financial pressures on the HE sector in Scotland, but it is clear that they require creative, positive responses to the needs of students, employers and society more broadly. Degree programmes that are closed in response to short term pressures are hard or impossible to reinstate in the long term: once they are gone, they are gone. We would therefore like to offer our strong and public support for the courses in LINCS, and for the excellent teachers and researchers who run them, and would be happy to contribute to any process that seeks to establish a long-term and sustainable future for them.

There is no other institution in Scotland that has been able to offer your particular focus on cultural expertise with a sustained, research-led commitment to translation and, most distinctly, interpreting. This is not a peripheral strength but a defining academic and strategic asset. To curtail the choice of languages would therefore not constitute a routine restructuring; it would represent a direct erosion of a nationally distinctive capability. A contraction of language provision will carry significant strategic and reputational consequences, and will lead to talented linguists from home and abroad looking elsewhere. No university that dismantles language programmes can claim, as Heriot-Watt does, to be genuinely internationalist in its aspirations, or to have an interest in the employability of its graduates in a global market. As a university that has been consistently at the forefront of teaching and research in translation and interpreting, Heriot-Watt is now in danger of damaging its hard-earned international unique selling point.

A focus on languages widely taught in schools fails to acknowledge the demand and structural importance for ab initio teaching as a route for accessing degree-level learning across the sector in Scotland: Scottish institutions have an opportunity to work against the cycle of neglect of strategically important languages at school level and to stimulate demand. You will be aware that opportunities for students from Scotland to study German to a high level have been in decline over many years, and are increasingly restricted to programmes at the so-called 'Ancient Universities'. The resulting concentration has adverse implications for accessibility and social representativity. This contraction should not be misconstrued as an organic shift in student preference; it is the predictable outcome of incremental, short-term decision-making. There is demand for German at university level, despite the decline in school teaching. Successful institutions acknowledge the problem and work with partners to provide alternative access routes for students who have not had the opportunity to learn at school.

We also note that the individual language areas do not act as self-standing units; collaboration across languages and with other disciplines is an integral and desirable part of all languages programmes, contributing intellectual depth and helping to create a sustainable model. Courses taught only through the prism of English, whatever the subject, are impoverished in comparison with those that draw on broader linguistic and cultural expertise. We have always regarded the innovative, interdisciplinary teaching and research culture of LINCS as a model for the sector in Scotland and beyond, and we suggest that increased collaboration across cognate disciplines would offer an intellectually cohesive, interdisciplinary model that is sustainable in the long run.

Aside from the intellectual and broader disciplinary benefits of language learning, we are sure you are also aware of the professional and economic benefits for graduates of languages. Recent research by the British Academy has shown that they are just as likely to be employed as their STEM counterparts, and employers regularly lament the lack of language skills amongst UK graduates. Indeed, the shortage of British linguists is thought to cost the UK economy 3.5% of GDP every year, with German being the most in-demand additional language in the UK job market. In order to compete on a global market, we should thus be removing linguistic barriers rather than seeking to erect them; in this respect, the UK is already far behind its global competitors. With trading partners around the globe, the UK is in desperate need of graduates who are linguistically and culturally equipped for global markets.

For all these reasons, short-termist responses to specific conditions cause long-term damage. We therefore urge you to show confidence in your LINCS colleagues and their commitment, creativity and understanding of the context in which they teach and research, and to work together with them in developing a sustainable future for these irreplaceable disciplines.

With best wishes,



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