

1 June 2022

Nadhim Zahawi
Secretary of State for Education
Department for Education
Via e-mail Sec-OF-STATE.PS@education.gov.uk
CC Michelle Donelan
Minister of State for Universities
Via e-mail Universities.PS@education.gov.uk

Dear Secretary of State,

I am writing to raise serious concerns about a new wave of redundancies and course closures hitting UK universities, particularly post-92 institutions, and the threat this poses to the future of higher education.

Just in the last few weeks, De Montfort University, Roehampton University and Wolverhampton University have all announced significant redundancies and plans to close courses, the majority of which are in arts and humanities subject areas.

The plans as they stand would see 16 academics lose their jobs in the field of politics and international relations, music technology and English at De Montfort University. At Roehampton University, 226 academics are facing the sack in the schools of arts, humanities and social sciences, education, psychology and life and health sciences. Wolverhampton University is also planning to cull 146 courses, the majority of which are in performing arts, fashion, social sciences, interior design and fine art.

These proposals must be seen for what they are: a dangerous assault on higher education which will damage careers and severely restrict student choice.

Each of these institutions, as post-92 universities, has played a fundamental role in widening participation in higher education to working class communities. But the adoption by vice chancellors of the government's reductive agenda, which aims to restrict access to a varied university education, threatens to reverse this historic progress and fuel a bonfire of arts and humanities provision.

This dangers of this agenda can be seen clearly in the Department for Education's (DfE) slashing of funding to creative arts courses and frequent public attacks on so-called 'low value' courses. Threats from the DfE to bring in student number controls for particular courses and the new Office for Students regulatory system – both based on arbitrary graduate outcome measures – risk further narrowing access to arts, humanities and social sciences to a small elite.

Alongside your decision to lower repayment thresholds for tuition fee loans, and the

introduction of minimum entry criteria, it is clear that the government is making a concerted attempt to shrink the horizons and quash the aspirations of working-class students. If the proposals at De Montfort, Roehampton and Wolverhampton are repeated, as our union fears they may be, the future of the arts and humanities could be under grave threat, resulting in disaster in vital areas including the public sector and the creative industries, as well as impoverishing our culture.

The attacks on the arts and humanities are also extending beyond post-92s, with Goldsmiths University management currently trying to cut 46 posts across the departments of history, English and creative writing.

We are clear that a thriving society needs arts and humanities as much as it needs science and technology. Creative subjects have a hugely important role to play in responding to global challenges and the development of emerging technology. It makes no sense to withdraw government support, or for vice chancellors to toe the line. The only way to ensure greater stability – and to maintain and strengthen course choice – is by the reintroduction of core public funding for teaching and the abolition of student fees.

I urge you to act now to ensure that no departments face closure. We believe that reversing the government's 50% funding cut to 'high-cost' arts subjects will signal to the sector and students alike that the government recognises the vital importance of higher education and the arts in improving opportunity and supporting economic recovery.

In order to better stabilise institutions, I also call on you to abandon plans to restrict access to courses that do not meet arbitrary graduate outcomes data. Finally, you must commit to delivering sustained funding for higher education providers so they can continue to deliver world-leading provision and re-evaluate government funding for the post-16 sector to ensure that the sector can respond to demand for higher education to 2030 and beyond.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jo Grady". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Dr Jo Grady

General Secretary