

Council briefing on proposed cuts of over 50% to Swansea University's Department of Modern Languages (= ML)

NB This briefing summarises several documents sent to Council members which are listed under Abbreviations at the end.

Summary

In 2010 the Welsh Education Minister singled out Modern Foreign Languages (= MFL) as a '**national strategic priority**', along with Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths (= STEM) subjects. In his 2011 remit letter to HEFCW (published 16 March 2011), he repeated his instruction that MFL should be maintained. Swansea University's proposals to more than halve staff numbers in the Department of Modern Languages (= ML) therefore **directly counter the policy of the Welsh Assembly**.

These proposals are based on **false data**, are being carried through with **reckless haste**, will have a **devastating impact on the student experience**, and will **destroy a research-led department** with an excellent reputation. They will impact negatively on the University's **internationalisation agenda** and its **global brand**. They will severely weaken the University's ability to contribute to **WAG priorities of promoting social justice and a buoyant economy**.

About the proposals

The posts of 22 ML staff were declared 'at risk' on 6 August 2010. There was no prior consultation. In their Revised Management Proposals of March 2011 (= RMP) Swansea senior management propose an undergraduate curriculum which they maintain could be taught by 10 academic staff teaching on average 10 hours per week. 10 new posts are to be created as follows:

French	4	(cut from 6)
German	3.5	(cut from 6)
Spanish	2.5	(cut from 3 full time & 3 part time)
Italian	0	(cut from 2)

2 of the new posts are new early-career Welsh-medium posts, dependent on outside funding. The 19 current staff would thus be competing for 8 posts. Management proposes to implement the cuts **this summer** and claims that the impact on students would be 'light'.

False data

- **Research income:** Management's document (= RMP) states: 'ML QR income fell sharply as a result of [RAE 2008] from £717k in 2008-9 to £393k in 2009-10. Projected over the six year period of the likely REF cycle this represents a total loss of £1.8m to the University'. QR income did fall as the result of our outstanding performance in RAE 2001 dipping somewhat in 2008. But it is **misleading to describe a shortfall on a projection as a 'loss'**. QR income per staff member, adjusted for our current staff of 18.8, shows **ML staff averaging at £19,051, which is higher than the COAH average of £15,558**.
- **Staff-student ratios and contact hours:** it is reasonable for the ML staff-student ratio to be slightly lower than elsewhere in the College of Arts and Humanities (= COAH) because **1.** we carry out a lot of small-group Welsh-medium teaching (we administer the WAG-funded Welsh-Medium Development Plan), **2.** language teaching is recognised across the sector as a staff-intensive activity (hence its HEFCE financial rating at 1.3 of the standard unit of resource – a rating mirrored internally at Swansea), and **3.** year abroad students are not normally factored in but still need considerable administrative support. Our own estimation of our SSR based on existing staff numbers and our curriculum for 2011-12, including our new Languages for All programme, is **1:16, which,**

with the 1.3 multiplier, rises to 1.21. The contact hours would be **10 hours per week**, which is heavy for UK academics, who also have research and administrative responsibilities.

- **Undergraduate recruitment:** UK university language departments generally experienced a fall in applications following the 2004 decision to abolish a compulsory language at GCSE. However, ML at Swansea has consistently sought to **diversify its business:** we introduced beginners' language degree pathways, which have proved very successful and represent extraordinary added value (beginners to degree level in four years); we are developing plans for a three-language degree; we contribute substantially to the highly successful MA in Translation with Language Technology, which also runs as a two-year European masters; and we will launch a Languages for All programme in 2011-12 across campus.
- **Management's flawed plan:** despite assertions to the contrary, ML is not currently overstaffed. Since 2009 it has lost two posts in Italian, two in French, one in German, and three in Hispanic Studies, along with tutors in German, Catalan, Russian and Portuguese. These last three languages, two of them all-important BRIC languages, are now no longer taught at Swansea. While ML's plan is based on a spreadsheet of undergraduate and postgraduate teaching hours, **no figures are supplied** for management's claim that ML teaching could be carried out by 10 staff teaching 10 hours per week. Management's plan shows no recognition of the fact that 2 of the 10 would be **Welsh-medium** staff. **Italian** Joint Honours programmes could not be taught without lecturing staff, and would have to stop recruiting.

Student experience

- Above all, management's plan would have a devastating effect on the student experience. ML at Swansea has very high student satisfaction rates. In the **2009 National Student Survey**, French, German and Hispanic Studies each scored over 90% for overall student satisfaction, higher than the university and UK averages for those subjects. Quite apart from the impossibility of setting a curriculum in March to be taught in September with no idea of which staff will be left to implement it, students will be faced with huge class sizes, no choice of modules, and the sudden disappearance of half their lecturing staff (or in the case of Italian, all of them). **Student and parent protests are inevitable.**
- Students across campus, who have expressed strong interest in our **Languages for All** programme through market research would be disappointed as this could not be launched with 8 staff (see Languages for All survey results).
- Both of these consequences fly in the face of the University's **'You said, we did'** policy and the Minister's 2011 remit letter which stresses the **increasing importance of the student voice.**

Research

- ML at Swansea has an excellent international reputation for research and a distinguished history. In **RAE 2008, we were ranked first in Wales for our subject area** in terms of research strength. ML hosts the world-leading Centre for Contemporary German Literature and several other dynamic research centres and groups. We have a vibrant postgraduate culture, and our draft REF submission is already strong, two years before the cut-off point. COAH and the university cannot afford to lose this research expertise. The remaining staff under management's plan would have virtually no time for research; in all likelihood, ML would not be entered for the Research Excellence Framework (= REF) in 2013, which would signal the end of ML research at Swansea University and the effective relegation of the Department to a Language Centre.

Swansea University's internationalisation agenda

- Swansea University needs to be seen as outward-facing and international; these proposals would make it look **insular and parochial**. The university's own motto is 'Gweddw crefft heb ei dawn' ('Technical skill is bereft without culture'). Modern Languages, to a greater extent than perhaps any other department, gives its students both. HEFCW guidance on the movement of funded credits makes clear that the full range of linguistic and cultural modules making up language degrees should be protected.
- Languages graduates score very highly in employability. The Languages for All programme, which would also enhance the **mobility and employability of all Swansea students**, will be lost of management's proposals go ahead.

WAG priorities

- Along with the UK's emphasis on languages as a 'priority subject', as recently demonstrated in **the Browne review**, the **ARHC Delivery Plan**, the **British Academy report *Language Matters More and More***, the **CBI report 'Emerging Stronger: The Value of Education and Skills in Turbulent Times'**, and Michael Gove's insistence that **Languages be part of the English baccalaureate**, WAG designates ML as a '**strategic priority**' in Wales (the only non-STEM subject to be designated thus).
- As a nation we need linguists, to meet the demands of 21st century business, and increase our knowledge of other cultures. ML at Swansea is a flagship for the subject nationally, teaching its own students, but also supplying many graduates who go on to become ML teachers and translators in Wales. The **importance of ML for our future as a nation** is clearly understood by politicians and policymakers across all major Welsh and UK parties, which is why, alone among the arts and humanities, ML is designated a 'priority subject'.
- An example of **ML success** is the translation company Veritas Language Solutions, set up by two Swansea University graduates, which recently won the HSBC International Business Stars Award, presented by Lord Digby Jones. Commenting on the awards, Business Secretary Vince Cable said 'These companies demonstrate how British entrepreneurship is driving the small and medium-sized enterprise sector forward'. Sharon Stevens of Veritas said 'If it wasn't for Swansea University and the Modern Languages Department, we wouldn't be where we are today'.
- The end of **a regional hub of language expertise in South West Wales** - If the cuts are implemented, there will be no properly-staffed ML higher education unit in the whole of South West Wales, seriously restricting the educational opportunities for students across our region.

Fit for the future

ML is forward-looking and dynamic. We support the WAG agenda of widening access, social inclusion and the role of HE in supporting a buoyant economy. We also recognise the severe financial constraints on the university and its desire to offer high quality degrees for undergraduates with excellent grades and to increase postgraduate recruitment. Our document *Modern Languages: Future Directions* sets out a number of ways in which we will diversify our income streams while serving the needs of Wales and of the university. We will offer:

- An attractive suite of BA programmes with clear pathways through to our successful MA programmes in Translation with Language Technology (MATLT), European Cultures, Latin American Studies, Literary Translation, and Staging/Screening Europe.

These BA programmes will include: vocational programmes in translation with built-in work experience; three-language degrees; and single and joint honours programmes in French, German, Italian and Spanish. All students will have access to intensive language training, as well as translation modules and intercultural modules that provide in-depth knowledge of the culture of the relevant country while honing language skills. The possibility of taking one or two languages from *ab initio* to degree level means that we offer extraordinary added value.

- A framework within which new languages, for example Mandarin Chinese, Arabic or Polish, could be introduced.
- 10-credit language modules, decoupled from year of study but based on level of skill, to students across the campus as part of our Languages for All initiative. This will offer all Swansea students the chance to increase their employability. Progression will be assured by reference to European standards of language proficiency.
- Revision and language skills day schools for Welsh GCSE, A/S and A level pupils. We already promote language learning in schools by lecturing to A-level groups via the Welsh Video Conference Network and recently hosted a *Routes into Languages* event with CILT Cymru.
- Increased Welsh-medium provision, in line with the 2010 and 2011 WAG remit letters to HEFCW. Through the implementation of the national Welsh-medium Development Plan, for which we already receive funding, we aim to strengthen and consolidate the learning of modern foreign languages through Welsh. We will continue running Welsh-medium residential summer schools for Year 12 pupils across Wales.
- Credit-bearing academic reading modules in German and French which will appeal to MA students in, for example, History and Classics.
- MA programmes (see above) which can be studied full-time, part-time or as a two-year European Masters. The programmes in European Cultures, Staging/Screening Europe and Latin American Studies are designed so that they can be taken by language graduates and non-language graduates alike.
- Increased opportunities for e-learning at all levels.
- Public service interpreting through the MATLT.
- Increased collaboration with DACE, whose teachers provide language courses for the community in the South West Wales region.
- Increased PhD recruitment, for example through the PhD in Translation programme, and through joining the international consortium DESE (Doctorat d'études supérieures européennes). We have a strong track record of securing AHRC funding.
- Increased research grant capture. We are awaiting the results of major bids to the Wellcome Trust and RCUK, and are preparing other bids to the AHRC and other funding bodies such as a collaborative project on European Travellers to Wales and another on the 2009 Nobel Laureate, Herta Müller. These are all scholarly projects designed for maximum impact. With our research centres (Centre for Contemporary German Literature, ARTT, MEICAM, Centre for the Comparative Study of the Americas), and our

research expertise in European and Latin American cultures, we are well placed to succeed.

- Work-based learning. We are currently seeking European funding to launch work-based learning to SMEs across the convergence region of Wales.

These ambitions cannot be realised if, within six months, the department is more than halved.

The Department of Modern Languages is an invaluable resource for students, the University and for Wales. We call on senior management to withdraw these deeply damaging proposals, and to engage in genuine dialogue with ML, in order to promote – not weaken – language studies at Swansea.

Support for Modern Languages – opposition to the cuts

- 200** number of letters (that we know of) which have been sent to the Vice Chancellor and Registrar expressing concern about the proposals.
- 2682** number of people as of 21 March 2011 who have signed an online petition urging Council to reject the proposed cuts (<http://www.gopetition.com/petition/39117.html>).

Prominent figures registering their concern include

- **Baroness Coussins**, Chair of the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Modern Languages.
- **Baroness O'Neill**, former president of the British Academy and BBC Reith Lecturer.
- **Lord Kenneth O. Morgan**, former Swansea lecturer and Vice-Chancellor of Aberystwyth, distinguished Welsh historian and Labour peer.
- **Dr. Mererid Hopwood**, winner of National Eisteddfod chair, crown and literature medal.
- **Dr. Emil Brix**, Austrian Ambassador, London.
- **Peter Mikl**, Director, Austrian Cultural Forum in London.
- **Professor David Crystal**, linguist, author and broadcaster.
- **Professor Marina Warner**, President of the British Comparative Literature Association.
- **Professor Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak**, literary critic and theorist.
- **John le Carré**, novelist and thriller writer.
- **Caryl Phillips**, author and Professor of English at Yale.
- **Val McDermid and Andrew Taylor**, crime writers.
- **Herta Müller and Elfriede Jelinek**, authors and **Nobel Laureates**.
- **Dr Michael Bogdanov**, theatre director and Honorary Fellow of Swansea University.

International opposition - letters of support or petition signatures from

Albania, Argentina, Armenia, Australia, Austria, Belgium, Brazil, Canada, China, Congo, Denmark, England, Eritrea, Finland, France, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Luxembourg, Netherlands, New Zealand, Northern Ireland, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Reunion, Romania, Russia, Scotland, Serbia, Spain, Switzerland, Tunisia, Turkey, United States, Wales.

Politicians who have expressed concern – from across the political spectrum

Peter Black AM, Nick Bourne AM (Leader of the Opposition), Martin Caton MP, Stephen Crabb MP, Andrew Davies AM, Geraint Davies MP, Paul Davies AM (Shadow Minister for Education), Jill Evans MEP, Nerys Evans AM, Nia Griffith MP, Peter Hain MP (Shadow Welsh Secretary) Sian James MP, Bethan Jenkins AM, Edwina Hart AM (Minister for Health), Dai Lloyd AM, Val Lloyd AM, Jenny Randerson AM (Shadow Minister for Education), Rhodri Glyn Thomas AM.

Welsh Assembly Statement of Opinion (OPIN-2010-0070) tabled by Dai Lloyd AM, November 2010.

Press coverage of the proposals and opposition campaign

'Student survey boosts fight against language department cuts' (*Western Mail*, 17.3.11)

'Lack of foreign language skills puts prosperity in jeopardy', *Western Mail* (10 February 2011)

'Nobel Prize writers attack cuts in modern languages' (*Western Mail*, 4.10.10)

'Universities in Britain Brace for Cuts' (*New York Times*, 15.10.10)

'Languages are still key to understanding' (*Guardian*, 15.10.10)

'Language Cuts at Swansea University' (*ThirdYear.com*, 11.10.10)

'University plans to cut the number of modern language academics' (*The Waterfront*, 27.09.10)

'Wales Today: What's Happening to Small Businesses?' (Suite 101, 16.9.10)

'Warning over university's rethink of its modern languages provision' (*Western Mail*, 9. 9.10)

'Row as language jobs axed' (*Western Mail*, 7.9.10)

'Swansea University plans to halve number of modern languages academics' (*Western Mail*, 3.9.10)

'Voices raised as tongues silenced' (*Times Higher Education*, 2.9.10)

Excerpts from letters and petition comments

This would be a deeply shortsighted decision. The case for better - not less or worse - provision in languages is economically and culturally strong. I hope the university will think with great care about this proposal. **Baroness Onora O'Neill**

Everywhere I travel these days ... language learning is seen to be increasingly important, commercially, politically, and intellectually. The mood is there, from UNESCO's emphasis on intangible heritage to internet advertising campaigns. Now is not the time to be cutting language posts. They should be being consolidated and expanded, to meet the demands of a modern languages-aware society. **Prof. David Crystal**

As an Honorary Professor and Fellow of the University of Wales, and a former member of the teaching staff, I greatly regret the cuts that are proposed. They are harmful to Swansea since they threaten a department that has been a fount of scholarship and international collaboration at the University. They are also harmful to Wales and Britain as a whole since they contribute further to the failure of British universities to maintain robust centres of European languages, to the public detriment. **Lord Kenneth O. Morgan**

As a Neath boy and as an Honorary Fellow of Swansea University, I am utterly dismayed by these plans. I know first hand how languages can give young people opportunities and open up doors to a wider world: I owe a huge debt to my MA in French and German, which has helped pave the way to an international career of considerable reputation. My father, who held a Professorship in Modern Languages in Swansea in the 1930s, would be equally appalled by the current proposals. **Dr. Michael Bogdanov, theatre director.**

If it wasn't for Swansea University and the Modern Languages Department, we wouldn't be where we are today. We are up for a number of National Awards, utilising the skills attained during our time at Swansea University. If we had not been able to carry out our degrees then many businesses would not be trading

internationally as they are today and of course with our help and expertise by their side. The impact we are having on businesses is incredible – thanks to the training and help of Swansea University. **Sharon Stephens, former student, Veritas Language Solutions**

How does the University propose to fulfil its commitment to its current students? How can they honestly accept students this year or next when they cannot teach them to the required standard without the expert staff? Many of my students go to Swansea. The Welsh economy needs linguists and their many skills. Shame on the University. **Bernadine McGuire, Head of MFL, Neath Port Talbot College**

A philistine proposal that beggars belief. The MHRA is greatly concerned at this threat to a thriving research and teaching community. **Prof. Malcolm Cook** ... would weaken the Humanities at Swansea, as a whole. And is it not against the express policy of the Welsh Assembly? **Prof. Peter Read** ... educationally and culturally regressive, as well as economically damaging to the university and the region. **Prof. Tim Unwin**

... will deprive students of a vital opportunity to prepare themselves for a competitive international labour market ..., seriously impoverish intellectual life at a university that claims internationalism as one of its core values, and make a mockery of the University's claim that it occupies the 'forefront' of higher education teaching and research. **Prof Erica Carter**

My son carefully chose Swansea SPECIFICALLY to major in Italian and to do a degree in translation. He gave up a place at much better London university JUST because you were so well thought of in the courses he chose. I am disgusted that the university would destroy a perfectly good department, the futures of its students and without consultation to save an insignificant amount of money to the overall budget. There are ways to purchase and outsource that would save tenfold the amount of the cuts! **Renee Lowell, parent**

This sort of redundancy will completely destroy any postgraduate work. Who would want to research with only 2 or three staff? Without this, the department is just teaching language, which is nothing without an understanding of literature and history. **Thomas Russell, student**

Trwy israddio ac amharchu addysgu ieithoedd a diwylliannau eraill, rydym hefyd yn dirmygu gwerthoedd ac egwyddorion ein cenedl ni. **Dr Huw Williams** (*By downgrading and disrespecting language teaching and teaching about other cultures, we also deride the values and principles of our own nation.*)

The very least that management at Swansea should do is give Modern Languages time and support to identify additional income streams and to build on the department's considerable strengths. The hasty imposition of radical cuts is ultimately in nobody's interest. **Prof. Jonathan Long**

Our university needs to get its priorities straight. It can afford a whole load of pointless building work yet it "can't" afford to keep one its integral departments running! **Sam Barnett, student**
With HEFCW clearly highlighting the importance of languages in its Corporate Strategy with "Making Languages Count", this is certainly not the time to be cutting language resources if we want our graduates to fairly compete in today's global economy. Moreover, with the potential for an increase in student fees or introduction of a graduate tax, Swansea's student experience must not be compromised. **Andy Patton, SUSU International Student Officer**

[A] blow to Swansea's global focus, its international reputation, and its capacity to win collaborative funding with European Union partners. **Prof. Ray Bromley**

Totally illogical given the standing and achievements of Swansea's department of Modern Languages. **Prof. Martin McLaughlin**

Languages are what Swansea is famous for. **Dr Ernst Schonfield** ... This measure will have a knock-on effect throughout humanities at Swansea. **Prof. W. Daniel Wilson** ... Short-sighted and both culturally and economically damaging. **Prof. Pól Ó Dochartaigh**

Rhaid meithrin ieithoedd modern os yw Cymru i chwarae rhan lawn a theilwng yn rhyngwladol. **Cennard Davies** (*Modern languages must be nurtured if Wales is to play a worthy role on the international stage.*)

Modern Languages have been recognised in a raft of government reports as being of 'strategic' importance, and the present proposals ought to be subject to national scrutiny and debate. **Prof. Frank Finlay**

The foreign language program of our present-day universities may be cost intensive, but it is also one of the most important assets of the Faculty, if it wishes to preserve its international radiance, both in terms of staff and students. **Dr Ton Hoenselaars**

This can't go ahead!! The MFL Department at Swansea is brilliant. **Felicity Ludgate**

I urge the Council of Swansea University to reject these proposals; they will have a disastrous impact ... at a time when the UK has a serious shortage of graduates with linguistic and intercultural skills. **Dr Ian Roe**

'Iaith yw gwaed yr enaid a cherbyd syniadau', meddai Miguel de Unamuno, gadewch i ni sicrhau bod pobl Cymru yn cael pob cyfle i ddysgu eu hiaith eu hunain a chymaint o ieithoedd â phosib. Cadwch arbenigedd yr adran hon yma. **Dr Mererid Hopwood** (*'Language is the blood of the soul and the vehicle of ideas', says Miguel de Unamuno. Let's ensure that the people of Wales have every opportunity to learn their own language and as many languages as possible. Keep this department's expertise here.*)

Without linguists we cannot compete with other economic powers. Studying languages not only helps students to become proficient communicating in another language, but also familiarises them with intercultural exchanges ... and other numerous soft skills which are indispensable in today's workplace. Don't knock yet another nail into the UK economy's coffin. **Rachell Clarke**

How can you possibly justify this? We need more language teaching, not less! Swansea will become a glorified technical college soon and once it's gone it's hard to see how it can ever be brought back. **Mrs Tracey H**

Even as a scientist, I can see the stupidity of what can only be described as a short-sighted short-term fix. A strong modern language presence amongst our future business and scientific communities is crucial....even the government has acknowledged as much! Please, think again Swansea. **Dr Thomas Jones**

Abbreviations

Revised Management Proposals for the Restructuring of Designated Areas of Academic Activity, March 2011 (= RMP)

Appendix 1 [Management's original document, August 2010] (= A 1)

Modern Languages: Future Directions, November 2010 (= Future Directions)

Modern Languages at Swansea University: Response to Restructuring Proposals, September 2010 (= Response)

Senior Management (= SM)

Department of Modern Languages (= ML)

Department of Translation and Digital Communication (= TDC)

College of Arts and Humanities (= COAH)

Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths (= STEM)