



BRISMES

British Society for Middle Eastern Studies

British Society for Middle Eastern Studies, 71-75 Shelton Street, Covent Garden, London WC2H 9JQ

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Professor Adam Tickell
Vice-Chancellor and Principal
University of Birmingham

Sent via email

23 September 2026

Dear Professor Tickell,

Proposed cuts to language provision and Arabic Studies at the University of Birmingham

I am writing on behalf of the British Society for Middle Eastern Studies (BRISMES) to express our serious concern about proposed reductions in language provision at the University of Birmingham, and in particular the prospective loss of specialist expertise in Arabic Studies. At a time when Arabic and Middle Eastern Studies are already under considerable pressure across UK higher education, the loss of this provision at a major research university would have consequences extending well beyond an individual post.

We understand that the proposed changes would leave Birmingham without its only research-active member of staff in Arabic Studies. This would have immediate implications for research and doctoral supervision. Moreover, the proposed cuts also sit uneasily with commitments to diversifying and decolonising the curriculum: removing specialist expertise in Arabic, alongside proposed losses in Chinese, risks narrowing students' access to non-European languages, texts and intellectual traditions rather than broadening it. Once such specialist expertise is lost, it is exceptionally difficult to rebuild.

We are especially struck by these proposals in light of your own recent warning about the erosion of language provision. Speaking at the British Academy's SHAPE conference on 4 March 2026, you described the closure of modern language courses and the wider loss of important cultural assets across the humanities as a "national catastrophe", with such assets being lost "by stealth". BRISMES shares that concern.



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We therefore ask how the proposed loss of specialist Arabic expertise at Birmingham can be reconciled with your own call to protect these national cultural assets. If a university of Birmingham's scale, international reach and direct institutional engagement with the Arab world cannot sustain specialist Arabic expertise, this also raises the wider question of where such capacity is to be maintained within the UK university system.

We recognise the serious financial pressures facing universities, but urge Birmingham to consider the long-term academic and strategic consequences of these proposals before irreversible decisions are taken. Maintaining Arabic and other modern language expertise at Birmingham would safeguard valuable research and teaching capacity while demonstrating in practice the commitment to languages and cultural knowledge that you have so recently and publicly defended. We would welcome your response.

Yours sincerely,

Professor Nicola Pratt

BRISMES President

On behalf of the British Society for Middle Eastern Studies (BRISMES)