Subject: Response to email re: Translation and Interpreting at University of Birmingham

Dear Professor Pratt,

Thank you for your letter and the concerns you have outlined. I'd like to take the time to respond and, I hope, offer some reassurance about our commitment to academic endeavour in both Modern Languages and Middle Eastern Studies.

Earlier this year we made the difficult decision to undertake a consultation concerning proposed changes to the provision of our specialist postgraduate taught programmes in Translation and Interpreting. These changes are in response to a sustained reduction in demand, and our market intelligence does not indicate a future resurgence in student numbers.

This consultation does not change the fact that Modern Languages is hugely important to the University of Birmingham's mission and ambition. As a global university, we recognise the importance of Modern Languages as an academic discipline that supports greater understanding between peoples and cultures.

We know that Modern Languages students – all humanities students – are trained to develop the sorts of skills and capabilities that employers value most in graduates, for example, analytical thinking, creative problem-solving, careful judgement and empathy.

Our responsibility in universities is to ensure that the brightest minds can find those fundamental areas of study, which is why we are doing everything we can to ensure that our Modern Languages offering remains competitive and sustainable, including adapting decisively to a rapidly evolving external landscape.

We continue to support cross-cultural and postgraduate programmes, such as MA Language, Culture and Communication, and translation training will continue to be taught at undergraduate level. We are not withdrawing all expertise in this area.

You ask about Arabic and Middle Eastern Studies, in particular. At Birmingham, we are proud to host the Mingana Middle Eastern Collection, which comprises more than 3,000 Middle Eastern manuscripts in over 20 languages, including Arabic, Syriac, Ethiopic, Georgian, Hebrew, Samaritan and Armenian, including the Birmingham Qur'an.

We have an outstanding reputation in the study of Islam, as well as noted experts in history, politics and international relations, specialising in the Middle East. Research in

this area explores the relationship between Islam and the West, the politics of the Middle East, and historical, political and contemporary issues relating to the Middle East.

We are also opening new multi-subject courses – degrees that span traditional subject boundaries, built on the foundations of strong discipline knowledge, which are generating significant interest from applicants of diverse backgrounds.

You rightly note our Vice-Chancellor's commitment to Modern Languages, which he has expressed on several occasions. We are also rising in key domestic and international rankings: climbing 23 places into the Top 75 in QS World University Rankings by Subject and moving up to 12th in The Guardian Universities Guide.

As a Professor of Modern Languages as well as Head of the College of Arts and Law, I too am a passionate advocate for the discipline.

This is not a consultation we have embarked on without careful thought, particularly in light of decisions made concerning languages provision in other universities.

I hope that this helps you to understand the rationale behind our decision.

Yours sincerely,

Professor Helen Abbott

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Professor Helen Abbott

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