



Media, Communications &
Cultural Studies Association

Sir Andrew Chan, Chairman for Board of Governors
Birkbeck, University of London

Professor David S Latchman CBE, Vice Chancellor
Birkbeck, University of London

4th November 2022

Dear Sir Chan and Prof Latchman CBE,

Proposed restructuring and impact on Department of Film, Media and Cultural Studies

I write on behalf of the Executive Committee of the Media, Communication, and Cultural Studies Association (MeCCSA), which is the national subject association representing the interests of academic staff and students in its fields in UK Higher Education.

We have heard with alarm and dismay the impact of your proposed restructuring that involves removing up to 140 full-time equivalent academic and school administrative posts across the institution. We understand that up to seven of these posts could be removed from the Department of Film, Media and Cultural Studies, which equates to more than a quarter of established academic staff in this Department. This would inevitably threaten the viability of programmes that could not be resourced and potentially face closure.

The reputation of the University is significantly enhanced by the contribution of colleagues in the Department of Film, Media and Cultural Studies. Indeed the scale of the threatened cuts to this Department is particularly galling as you celebrate how their research was in REF2021 ranked 4th in UOA32 Art and Design (covering History of Art and Film, Media and Cultural Studies), with 65.4% of the submission assessed as being world-leading. This represents a rank improvement on the previous result by nearly 40 places.

Our primary concern is the possibility that a respected university should consider putting at risk a field of education that addresses crucial issues of citizenship and public understanding, media and cultural policy, and cultural value as well as the considerable contribution that the film industry makes to the economic prosperity of the UK. The central and growing importance of communications, film, and media generally in the lives of UK citizens makes it unthinkable that HEIs such as Birkbeck would not deliver rigorous, thorough, and properly resourced teaching and

research of high quality in these areas. The value of the subject area is underlined by the large and rapidly increasing numbers employed in those sectors of the economy related to the media, including film in its very varied forms. The sector 'contributed about £112bn to the UK economy in 2018, a 43.2% increase in real terms since 2010' (in estimates calculated by Oxford Economics) and its importance to the UK's future economic growth and to 'levelling up' ambitions is widely recognised. That 9.5 million people are employed in media and communication, performing arts, and related areas is one simple indicator of the strategic significance of these fields. Annual data from the Association of Graduate Careers Advisory Services continue to show that employment levels of graduates from these fields are among the highest of all subject areas, whether directly into those sectors, or into other fields where their training and skills are recognised and valued. All that is set at risk by any failure properly and extensively to provide teaching and learning in the fields.

For all these reasons we hope very much that you will recognise the broader importance of programmes in Department of Film, Media and Cultural Studies. We urge you to rethink the proposed restructuring in a way that preserves jobs and programmes that contribute both financially and reputationally to Birkbeck.

Yours Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Einar Thorsen', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Prof Einar Thorsen
Chair of MeCCSA