

Vanessa Redgrave and Hilary Mantel slam Roehampton arts cuts | Times Higher Education (THE)

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High-profile figures criticise university's plans for large cuts to arts and humanities, which it says are necessary because of the pandemic and low student numbers



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Vanessa Redgrave, Hilary Mantel, Julie Christie and Simon Schama are among those who have signed an [open letter](#) against jobs cuts in the arts and humanities departments at the [University of Roehampton](#).

The letter, also signed by musician Brian Eno, historian Tom Holland and actor Toby Jones, called on vice-chancellor Jean-Noël Ezingard and members of the university's council to “immediately halt your planned cuts that will lead to 40 redundancies” across the arts and humanities.

The group of artists, writers, actors, directors and other high-profile cultural figures urged the university “not to succumb to short-term commercial pressures and preserve the research excellence and broad ethos of your new university, which was instituted through its major reputation in these areas”.

The university has said that it needs to make £3.2 million worth of salary cuts because of the financial

pressures of the pandemic, and chose arts and humanities because of low student numbers. Ten people in the schools have already taken voluntary redundancy.

The threatened subjects, which include history, drama, dance and English, “have a remarkable track record in employment, widening participation and furthering cultural diversity”, they write.

“To cut them now will irreparably damage the culture industries that have done so much to help us survive the pandemic; it will narrow opportunities and deprive so many people of their futures in fraught times,” the letter says.

The university was one of the [first institutions in the country to announce job severances](#) due to the financial difficulties caused by the coronavirus. The local University and College Union branch said that the voluntary redundancy scheme had already resulted in the loss of 60 jobs. The branch recently passed a vote of no confidence in the vice-chancellor and has launched a consultative ballot over whether to take industrial action over the cuts.

One academic at the university told *Times Higher Education* that arts and humanities were being unfairly targeted by the cuts, despite high levels of student satisfaction and attainment. At the same time as the cuts to arts were announced, the university published adverts for new jobs in other areas, including ten positions in the psychology department, they said.

“Roehampton is a leading post-92 research institution in arts and humanities, but these cuts will have a big impact on research and teaching quality in these departments, and leave those left behind with an unbearable workload,” they said.

They added that it appeared to be a “policy shift from the top” away from arts subjects towards more lucrative disciplines.

A spokeswoman from the [University of Roehampton](#) said that the university had been implementing a recovery plan to address the severe financial impact from the Covid-19 pandemic for the past few months “and we need to continue on this path to secure our long-term growth”.

“To support our long-term sustainability, we are planning to make savings in the Schools of Arts and Humanities where there has been a decline over a number of years in student numbers both nationally and at our own institution. These measures will put the Schools on a more sustainable footing to secure their longer-term future and also allow the University to invest in academic areas where the student population is growing” she said