

# Linguistics Campaign

Contributed by Administrator  
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## Linguistics at Sussex under threat

UCU is working to reverse a unilateral decision by University management to close the degree in Linguistics. The decision, which was announced shortly after Senate, will - if allowed to proceed - result in several redundancies, significantly increased workloads for the staff remaining, and restrictions on freedom to research in areas of expertise and international repute. The 'proposal' has not been considered or scrutinized by any committee of the University, nor were any affected departments (other programmes use the same courses) consulted as required.

The following information has been prepared by colleagues in Linguistics. We urge colleagues to lend their support to the campaign to save Linguistics, to ensure that the University of Sussex respects its own rules and procedures, and that academic freedom is secure. The withdrawal of Linguistics at Sussex: fact sheet  
 In a decision that was made public to staff and students in week 10 of the spring term, management withdrew the Linguistics programme at Sussex, despite the fact that this programme

- is ranked 2nd in country in the Independent's Good University guide, with an overall score of 99.1 (and ranked 8th in the Times),
- has some of the best students at Sussex in terms of entry tariffs (average 420 UCAS-points, current A-level requirement AAB-ABB),
- is in high demand, with one of the strongest applications-to-admissions ratios at Sussex (currently there is only about one place for every nine applicants),
- has the highest graduate placement and employment rate of all linguistics programmes in the UK (75% 6 months after completing the degree),
- contributes courses to many interdisciplinary programmes in humanities, education and sciences

While current linguistics cohorts (72 students) will be taught out to completion of their degrees, the admission of new students for 2009 has already been stopped, and their offers have been withdrawn or changed into English Language offers. All teaching in Linguistics will therefore cease in 2011, and the university will no longer support research in Linguistics. Remaining members of faculty are required to redirect their research to the new research theme of "English Language and Applied Linguistics", according to management. At the same time, the current annual intake of students will be reduced to 20 full-time equivalents in English Language only. This effectively reduces the number of English Language students as well, despite Dean Stephen Burman's statement that he sees English Language as an area of growing demand.

There are currently 3.5 research-active members of staff and 2 full-time equivalents of fixed-term teaching-only faculty. The plan is that the fixed-term contracts will be immediately reduced to 1.5; by 2011, all members of faculty will have to reapply for the remaining 3.5 posts, under conditions that are yet to be determined. It may be the case that some of the remaining posts will be advertised as teaching-only.

The withdrawal of Linguistics does not lead to a significantly diminished teaching load in the first year (Linguistics and English Language students take the same courses in their first year), but half a teaching-only position will already be shed in 2009. This means that the remaining teaching-only faculty have to teach more hours: their annual teaching load will be extended from 300 to 400 contact hours a year. The existing teaching-only faculty must compete for the remaining positions.

The decision to withdraw Linguistics follows less than two years after the old department of Linguistics and English Language was merged with English, a move which was then justified as a move to ensure sustainability of the programmes. In previous years, the number of permanent research staff had already been reduced from 7 to 3, putting the subject in a precarious situation.

This decision, moreover, was made in contravention of proper procedures. There was no department-internal discussion in English, and the withdrawal has not yet been approved by the school Teaching and Learning Committee. Formally, the withdrawal has therefore not been ratified. Nevertheless, since admissions for 2009 are already being withdrawn, the proposal is rendered a fait accompli. In addition, Senate has not been informed of the decision, which was only publicised after the final meeting of Senate in spring.

Management have argued that a reason for withdrawal is lack of demand and nationally falling application numbers. In fact, application numbers have been stable for Linguistics and Linguistics/Languages applications since 2007 (at 69 a year), English Language and Linguistics applications have dropped moderately (by 18 percent, which are to some extent due to a change in application procedures in 2008; in 2009, applications have risen by 30 percent again). In contrast,

applications for English Language without Linguistics (including English Language and Literature and English Language/Languages) have halved in the same period of time. We therefore cannot see how student demand can have played a role in the decision to withdraw Linguistics. We are also deeply concerned by the way management redefines academic freedom by disallowing faculty members to pursue research topics in which they are internationally recognised experts, instead limiting 'allowable' research to the areas of 'English Language and Applied Linguistics'. This research agenda takes no account of existing faculty specialisations, which are well suited to existing University research themes. Such an infringement on academic freedom has just been declared illegal by the Irish Labour Court in a dispute between lecturers and management at Trinity College (see also Times Higher Education Supplement, March 12, 2009), and there is little indication that UK courts would judge much differently on this matter.

- In sum, Linguistics and English Language staff and students protest the planned withdrawal of Linguistics sharply, for the following reasons:
- The Linguistics programmes are successful, internationally recognised and in high demand; application rates have not dropped significantly over the past years.
- The decision has been made without consultation of staff, students or the relevant committees.
- The imminent reduction of teaching-only positions at the expense of the remaining staff teaching more hours is unjustified.
- The termination of all contracts and reemployment under new, yet undisclosed conditions is unacceptable.
- The top-down imposition of new research themes is a blatant infringement on academic freedom.

We also believe that these decisions have repercussions beyond Linguistics at Sussex since they are indicative of a new style of top-down management by which other departments and subjects may be affected as well in the future. Internationally recognised scholars, among them Noam Chomsky, Steven Pinker and David Crystal, have already expressed their concerns at the management's decision.

Here is the latest article from the local press:

[http://www.theargus.co.uk/news/4229197.Chomsky\\_speaks\\_out\\_against\\_Sussex\\_University\\_bosses](http://www.theargus.co.uk/news/4229197.Chomsky_speaks_out_against_Sussex_University_bosses)

There is a petition at:

[http://www.ipetitions.com/petition/Save\\_linguistics/](http://www.ipetitions.com/petition/Save_linguistics/)

Please write to: The Vice Chancellor, Professor Michael Farthing: [vc@sussex.ac.uk](mailto:vc@sussex.ac.uk)

The Pro-Vice Chancellor for Education, Professor Joanne Wright: [Joanne.Wright@sussex.ac.uk](mailto:Joanne.Wright@sussex.ac.uk)

The Dean of the School of Humanities, Dr Stephen Burman: [S.F.Burman@sussex.ac.uk](mailto:S.F.Burman@sussex.ac.uk)

The acting Head of English, Dr Peter Boxall: [P.Boxall@sussex.ac.uk](mailto:P.Boxall@sussex.ac.uk)

The incoming Head of English, Professor Tom Healey: [t.healy@english.bbk.ac.uk](mailto:t.healy@english.bbk.ac.uk)

Copies of all letters will also be forwarded to all members of the University Senate. We will publish letters of support on this site if they are sent to [ucusussex@sussex.ac.uk](mailto:ucusussex@sussex.ac.uk)