

# SCUDD

The Standing Conference of  
University Drama Departments

Professor Jean-Noël Ezingard, Vice Chancellor, University of Roehampton  
Professor Anna Gough-Yates, Provost, University of Roehampton  
Phil Walker, Chair of Council, University of Roehampton  
Akram Khan, Pro-Chancellor, University of Roehampton

2<sup>nd</sup> November, 2020.

Dear Colleagues,

I am writing on behalf of the Standing Conference of University Drama Departments (SCUDD), the nationally recognised Subject Association in the United Kingdom representing 79 member departments.

We are alarmed to hear that the Department of Drama, Theatre and Performance (DTP) at Roehampton University is under threat, as part of plans to cut the budget of the School of Humanities and the School of Arts. We understand that the University plans to reduce the staff in DTP to less than half its original size. These cuts will have a debilitating effect on research and teaching for many years to come, which will go far beyond the stated policy of ‘re-balancing’ the University’s teaching and research portfolio, and target DTP disproportionately. These cuts to DTP will inevitably diminish the student experience, one of the strengths of the department, and thus a significant element of the University’s overall reputation.

Drama, Theatre and Performance at Roehampton is a leading unit in the national discipline in both research and teaching. In REF2014, 81% of its research was recognised by peers as ‘world-leading’ or ‘internationally significant.’ In the past REF cycle, colleagues in DTP have received research funding from the European Research Council, the AHRC, the British Academy and the Leverhulme Trust, funding adventurous performance research projects pursued through public engagements. The Department is an international meeting place for scholars, and over the current REF period has hosted 86 guests, including international visitors from Australia, Canada, France, Germany, Ghana, Greece, Holland, Italy, Nigeria, Singapore, Spain, and the USA. Doctoral funding in the Department has come from an impressive range of sources, including the UKRI Doctoral Training Partnership (including CDAs), and extending to scholarships from the Onassis Foundation, the Gulbenkian Foundation, the Ministry of Education Taiwan, and from the Portuguese Fundação para a Ciência e a Tecnologia.

Teaching in DTP at Roehampton has consistently achieved the highest student satisfaction scores across the university, with undergraduate Drama courses scoring an average of 90% on the 2020 NSS. Cutting Drama, Theatre and Performance by over 50% will have a disproportionate impact on

pressing matters of equality, diversity and inclusion for Roehampton University. DTP at Roehampton specialises in teaching students who have had little previous formal education, who come from underprivileged backgrounds, and most of whom are the first in their family to go to university. Notwithstanding this undergraduate profile, DTP graduates have a near 100% rate of employment or pursuit of further education; graduates of DTP include Olivier winning actor and MBE Matt Henry (*Kinky Boots*), Olivier nominated actress, Rachel John (most recently seen starring in *Hamilton*), and Tristan Fynn-Aiduenu an award winning playwright and director. These three leading Black British artists also represent Roehampton's excellence in diversity and widening participation - over 60% of DTP students are from Black and other ethnic minority backgrounds.

The push to make savings through disproportionate cuts in the Arts and Humanities, and in Drama particularly, is in unimaginative conformity to short-term political agendas, using the global pandemic as an excuse. It is particularly ironic that proposals to cut Drama, Theatre and Performance will have an impact on the very industries – the performing arts and cultural sector – in the UK which have sustained the nation's mental health and well-being throughout the privations of lockdown and the current restrictions under which we all live. Such cuts will also have a direct economic impact, as Roehampton graduates feed into an industry which contributes £10.6 billion to the UK economy each year ('Why Arts and Culture Matters,' Arts England).

We urge you to reconsider these disproportionate cuts, and instead, develop a courageous and long-term strategy which acknowledges the central contribution the Arts and Humanities make to Roehampton University, and the contribution Roehampton graduates make to the creative industries in the UK. Now, more than ever, UK universities need to invest in the development of skilled and creative graduates from diverse backgrounds, in order to help us re-imagine our post-pandemic world.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Kate Newey". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned above the typed name and title.

Professor Kate Newey  
Chair, Standing Conference of University Drama Departments  
Professor of Theatre History, Department of Drama, University of Exeter

[k.m.newey@exeter.ac.uk](mailto:k.m.newey@exeter.ac.uk)

[scuddexec@gmail.com](mailto:scuddexec@gmail.com)