

Item 10a: Area studies

The main issue which has been engaging Area Studies as a discipline over the last couple of years has been REF submissions, and attempts to lobby colleagues across Modern Languages to consider submitting to UoA25. This is obviously no longer relevant, as decisions have been made. With the uncertainty only just announced re. REF timetables, due to COVID19, it is too early to evaluate the impact of this.

UK Council for Area Studies Associations (UKCASA) provides the umbrella association for Area Studies work in the UK, and since Tony Chafer stood down as President in October, I understand that Professor Alan Hallsworth, currently at the University of Portsmouth Business School, and longstanding member of the British Association of Canadian Studies, has taken over as an interim measure (at least).

Re. the issue I raised in my last report (in relation to the UCML Exec) about the intersection/overlap between Area Studies and the other Exec members – I haven't yet had any responses from colleagues about this (hardly a priority at the moment) but I will repeat the invitation if anyone has strong views about whether or not our remits do need to be more clearly defined, please contact me!

I was involved in discussions with UCML about responses to the proposed removal of the Pre-U school curriculum which is probably outwith the Area Studies remit but since I have been closely involved with the Pre-U for Chinese for some time and am aware of the impact it will have. In a separate role, as Chair of the Expert Panel for Mandarin Excellence Panel, I wrote separately to the Schools Minister and his response is encouraging but non-committal! At the risk of sounding like a broken record in this report – this will clearly not be a priority for anyone just now, but worth revisiting at the next Exec.

For reasons that I think are completely understandable, I have not received updates at this time from UKCASA, as priorities are, correctly in my view, elsewhere. The following musings therefore, are my own.

In the longer term, we will need to evaluate the impact that this crisis has had on the field, perhaps specifically with regard to carrying out fieldwork in other countries, the appropriate amount of overseas travel for academics – so potentially rethinking whether or not certain research projects, and supervision of some international PGRs can/should be done remotely -- and the question of whether or not it is necessary to attend academic conferences in person, rather than online, will all I think be hot topics for discussion.

In particular, I would add, with the welcome release of many library and pedagogical resources as free-to-view (in response to the current crisis), the UK (and other European nations) focus on Open Access publishing, and the global awareness-raising of climate and environmental issues – it seems to me that, once the immediate crisis is past, the timing will be ripe for us all to seriously reconsider how many of our activities can in future be approached differently. It may also be one of the very few (only) positives to come out of this.

Frances Weightman, 4/4/20