

Item 10i: Slavonic & East European studies

1. COVID-19

As I was gathering information for this report and writing it up, the COVID-19 pandemic has caused great upheaval in the higher education sector, as in so many areas of our lives. Understandably, very few colleagues in higher education responded to my requests for information, as universities are currently dealing with to deal with the transition to online teaching and the restructuring of assessment and the academic year, as well as disruption to the research agenda, with access to libraries and archives limited and travel severely restricted.

The challenges for Slavonic and East European languages are similar to other disciplines. Our national scholarly association, the British Association of Slavonic and East European Studies (BASEES), has postponed our annual conference. The FCO advice against all but essential foreign travel, making it difficult for colleagues to carry out fieldwork research. Moreover, many countries have barred or restricted entry to UK nationals.

2. Undergraduate teaching

All universities are currently grappling with the transition to online learning and the concomitant changes to the assessment. However, for modern languages, including Slavonic and East European languages, perhaps the most pressing question concerns our students studying or working abroad. It is my understanding that universities have followed the FCO advice and asked students to return home as soon as is conveniently possible. Some students have chosen to remain abroad.

In some cases, UK students are able to continue their study placements with Russian institutions through online learning, though this inevitably can only partially compensate for the immersive experience of a full semester or year in the country. At the moment, colleagues at several institutions are preparing additional resources for students returning home, so that they are able to stay connected with the language and with their university programmes. In the next academic year, we must prepare to make alterations to our curriculum and our expectations for final-year students, many of whom will have their year abroad interrupted.

3. Postgraduate research

PGRs have been particularly affected by the pandemic. Their ability to travel, conduct fieldwork, visit archives, etc., has been curtailed, with no clear sense of when the restrictions will lift; often such work is crucial to timely completion of their thesis. PGRs work on a tight schedule and are often in economically precarious circumstances.

I would like to ask UCML colleagues during the upcoming meeting whether they would support lobbying the universities and research councils (and, perhaps, ultimately, the UK government) to offer support to our PGRs. The format of this should be discussed; at the very least, I propose it should be a no-cost extension to their study for anyone affected. It is vital that any offer be extended not only to students who are funded by the research councils, but to students who have alternative funding sources or are self-funding; often these are the most precarious of our PGRs.

4. Report on the state of Slavonic and East European Studies in the UK

Dr Muireann Maguire (Exeter) has recently published 'Slavic Studies in the UK', a thorough state-of-the-field report, as part of the *Slavic and East European Journal's* series on Slavic Studies around the world. The full reference is: Muireann Maguire, 'Slavic Studies in the UK', *Slavic and East European Journal* 63.3 (2019): 349-360.

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