

## Item 10i: Slavonic and East European Studies

This is a report on Slavic and East European (SEE) Languages in UK Higher Education, covering the period April – November 2020. The report is based on a consultation with academics in university departments teaching SEE languages, the executive committee of our scholarly association, the British Association for Slavonic and East European Studies (BASEES), and the broader BASEES membership.

### 1. COVID-19: Research and Teaching

The Covid-19 pandemic has had significant impact in many areas of our lives in 2020, including research and teaching in Slavic and East European Languages. Many universities face increased financial pressures as a result of the pandemic, and most academics report heavier workloads than normal, as we adapt to blended and online methods of teaching.

However, most universities with degree programmes in SEE languages report that undergraduate recruitment has not suffered as a result of the pandemic. Academic staff report that, despite increased workload pressures, they have carry out teaching to the usual standard, even if research time has inevitably been squeezed. Some academics raised concerns about the difficulty of teaching language through in-person classes with masks (which hide the tongue and the mouth, and can hinder articulation). Some voiced frustrations that senior university administrators did not take into account the difficulties.

### 2. Covid-19: the Year Abroad

Institutions have taken a variety of different approaches to the Year Abroad. In some cases, students have travelled to placements and had a positive experience, pandemic notwithstanding. Some students who have travelled abroad feel that they did not yet the full Year Abroad experience because of lockdown measures in the country / locality they are based in. And some students have remained in the UK, taking classes online with host institutions in Russia and other East European countries. The diversity in practice reflects different institutional approaches, variations between and within host countries, and the students' own preferences and needs. Some uncertainty remains about whether students will be able to travel abroad in 2021, but contingency arrangements are in place.

### 3. Undergraduate programme news

Following a two-year suspension, the University of Bath has resumed recruitment for Russian, with the first cohort arriving in September 2020. Russian can be studied *ab initio* only as part of the BA Modern Languages and the BSc International Politics and Russian.

The University of Bristol, one of the few UK universities to offer an undergraduate degree programme in Czech (as part of a joint honours degree), has suspended entry to the Czech programme from September 2020. This decision follows the departure of a senior member of staff specializing in Czech literature. Bristol retains provision for existing students on the Czech degree programme, as well as Czech language modules as a popular option for students in the School of Modern Languages.

#### 4. Major research initiatives

The Feast and Famine Project: Confronting Overabundance and Defectivity in Language has been awarded £791k from the AHRC. This project, led by Neil Bermel at University of Sheffield, is focused on the morphology of East European languages, also reaching into language planning and language culture (with emphasis on Czech, Croatian, Finnish and Estonian). You can read more here. <https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/feastandfamine>

#### 5. News from BASEES

BASEES has cancelled its annual conferences for 2020 and 2021 because of the global pandemic. BASEES will return to Robinson College, Cambridge in spring 2022, followed by Glasgow in 2023 and Cambridge again in 2024.

A new BASEES Study Group for Minority History has been established, led by Olenka Palko (Birkbeck) and Samuel Foster (U of East Anglia). <http://basees.org/study-group-for-minority-histories>

BASEES issued [a statement on Black Lives Matter](#) in June 2020.

BASEES issued an [Open Letter to the Rector of the Higher School of Economics](#), a leading university in Russia, following an institutional restructuring that raised questions about academic freedom at the institution in July 2020.

BASEES issued [a statement on intellectual freedom in Belarus](#) after the events following the Presidential Elections of 9 August on 13 August 2020.

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