

# UCML Exec Committee

**4th December 2020 14:00–16:00 by Zoom**



## Item 9.a: Northern Ireland

The year 2020 has presented unique challenges as well as unique opportunities. Northern Ireland is no exception to this, with the impact of the pandemic and the imminence of Brexit.

### UCML in NI

In preparation for this first report since taking up this representative role, contact was made with senior colleagues in Queen's University Belfast (School of Arts, English and Languages), Ulster University (School of Education, and School of Communication and Media), Stranmillis University College, and St Mary's University College, to highlight the work of UCML and establish lines of communication.

Online meetings were held with colleagues in NICILT and the British Council NI, raising awareness of the role of UCML, and highlighting particularly the upcoming 2020 Winter Plenary and the small grants scheme. Two further meetings have been scheduled in early December with Professor Rafaella Folli, Provost (UU) together with her fellow lecturers in languages and linguistics, and with Dr David Barr, Head of School of Education (UU). A meeting is planned for early January with language subject leads at Queen's University for French, Irish and Spanish and Portuguese. A short online survey to gain a better understanding of the experiences and views of individual colleagues in languages across HEIs in NI is considered for early 2021.

### Teaching, learning and research

The vast majority of learning, teaching and research activity in NI has moved online, and colleagues report heavy workloads associated with this. In Initial Teacher Education, student placements in schools, and the assessment of these, present key challenges. Significant, creative work has been undertaken in planning for international student mobility, and the Year/ Semester Abroad remains an important area of concern.

### Policy

We await the publication of two important reviews, of GCSE Grading and Curriculum Specifications respectively. For GCSE Summer 2021, the speaking element in language qualifications has been removed in NI, and, unlike other regions, teacher endorsement of speaking skills in absence of the speaking assessment will not be included. As a result, portability of GCSE language qualifications from NI across the UK nations is a matter of concern. NI continues to remain the only UK region without a statutory requirement to learn an additional language in primary school.

### Engagement with Stakeholders

**British Council NI** is hosting a series of three online conversations entitled 'Schools Think Next' addressing key topics in education for the region, accompanied by an associated social media

campaign. The first conversation will take place on 9<sup>th</sup> December 2020, focusing on Intercultural Education. The panel for this includes Professor Janice Carruthers (QUB) and representatives from education, cultural groups and the media. The British Council NI Mandarin Speaking Competition will take place this year with an online format, including a live digital celebration event in May. All schools and FE Colleges in NI with an interest are being encouraged to get involved.

**NICILT** continues to engage very positively and creatively with schools across NI, despite a challenging economic climate. Current projects include the Hispanofest and Francofest young enterprise events, Languages for Employability (live workshops and the development of resources), and translation competitions. These initiatives are fully online, and numbers of schools involved are very healthy. However, disappointingly, the future of the successful A level language debating competitions is uncertain.

**The British Education Research Association (BERA) British Curriculum Forum** steering group have expressed interest in opening conversations with UCML to explore collaboration. Like UCML they offer a small grants scheme and facilitate events (currently online) for practitioners in educational settings across the UK nations, focusing on curriculum and related research.

Sharon Jones

UCML NI Representative

27/11/20