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Summary of 3-Year Degree Programmes in Modern Languages Survey

In light of the combined impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and Brexit/the UK's withdrawal from Erasmus+, UCML was asked to survey the modern languages sector with a view to determine how widespread the practice of 3-year degree programmes in modern languages is, and how many departments are actively considering moving to shorter programmes. In the case of Scottish institutions, this should be taken to mean 4-year programmes, since modern languages degrees there take 5 years as standard (including a year abroad).

The survey received responses from 40 institutions. These are listed at the end of this document.

Of the 40 responding institutions, 27 reported that it was possible to take a modern languages programme without a year abroad, while 13 reported that it was not. Within these latter 13, 5 said that their institution was considering formally introducing programmes without a year abroad as an option from the UCAS stage (all but one of these institutions were Russell Group). Among the 27 who reported that this was already possible, a further 3 suggested they too were considering making this option available from the UCAS stage.

Within the 27 that reported a 3-year programme (4-year in the case of Scottish institutions) was already available (of which 11 in the Russell Group), there was significant divergence as to the circumstances in which this option was available to students. 17 explained that this was available only in specific cases, either for students on minor programmes with a major outside the languages department, or for those with mitigating circumstances (these included caring responsibilities, health reasons, or students who are already native speakers). At 1 institution, a shorter programme without a period of mobility was available only for the BA in Translation. At another institution, the 3-year programme had a different title ('Language Studies') from the 4-year programme ('Modern Language Studies'). 13 reported that a programme without a year abroad was already available at the UCAS application stage.

9 of the institutions who reported already offering 3-year programmes stated that this included a mobility component. The length and form of this mobility period varied, but included:

- 1-week residential;
- 3-week summer school at the end of year 1;
- semester 1 of year 2;
- semester 2 of year 2;
- 5-8 weeks at level 5 (year 2);
- 8-week placement that can be taken from home;
- 8-16 weeks (depending on level) that can be split over 2 years;
- optional semester abroad at the start of final year.

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At 3 institutions, this mobility period was not assessed. A further 3 report that students complete assessments at a partner institution abroad, which are then converted to become compatible with marks at the home institution to calculate an overall mark for the mobility component. For 3 institutions, the mobility component is assessed through a portfolio.

The survey's final question asked respondents whether the proposal of a modern languages programme that did not include a full year abroad raised any questions around quality assurance, in particular with relation to the QAA benchmark statements. For a number of institutions, this was not problematic because the 3-year programme is in place for only exceptional cases, where a student is already a native speaker of the language, for health reasons, or, as in most cases amongst respondents, introduced as a temporary measure to mitigate the impact of COVID-19 on their students who were unable to travel to take up placements. In cases where a 3-year programme is offered only in exceptional circumstances, it seems these decisions are closely scrutinised by the institution's quality office.

In the cases where the 3-year programme is offered on a more widespread basis, a range of responses were received, which have been reproduced here in full:

- No issues around European languages (residency abroad not compulsory for all European languages studied), but for Chinese/Japanese intensive language tuition is required before starting the final year or, there is the option for students to drop the East Asian language if it is studied alongside other languages/subjects.
- We are introducing a BA in Modern Languages from September 2022, for which the YA is optional (so it'll be either a 3- or 4-year BA(Hons)). We did not get quality assurance questions on QAA benchmarks as we mapped all learning outcomes achievable by not going abroad onto crucial QAA items.
- Students can only take a 3-year programme if they have an A at A-level in the required language.
- Students on this course will achieve a C1 level (lower level than students on a 4-year language degree).
- Not sure what happened when the programme was proposed years ago, but questions were raised by one of the Externals at the revalidation event which took place 2 years ago.
- The main programme level learning outcomes (PLOs) are identical for the 3-year and 4-year programmes, but the students on the 4-year programme have one additional PLO which makes specific reference to 'first-hand' intercultural experience. The QAA benchmark refers to the value of residence abroad in 'developing and enhancing' the intercultural skills etc. Students on the 3-year programme do 'develop awareness and sensitivity to' intercultural norms (as set out in our PLOs). The added value of the year abroad is the demonstrated ability to assess these things 'first-hand'.

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- As the three-year programme combines the study of one language with Business, we used the QAA benchmarks for both Languages and related studies and Business and Management. Core language modules are mapped onto the CEFR.
- The three-year version has existed for more than 20 years. Students are directed to specialise in translation rather than productive skills in their final-year module choices and do make significant progress through their year 2 placements - there are only one or two students per year on this route and the majority take intensive language courses.
- Language Studies students can finish with C1 proficiency as the highest level, whereas Modern Languages finishes with at least one C2 Mastery level language and contains a compulsory year abroad.
- I wasn't at the institution when this programme was approved, so cannot comment - but students are expected to complete the same language modules as those on 4-year programmes in the final year. We have just introduced slightly lower-level final-year language modules for students who started a language as a beginner and didn't do a year abroad placement in that language. Numbers are small on these modules (and are often taken by triple language students in their third language), but they allow for more flexibility across the board. They still (just) enable students to reach proficiency level - but students taking these modules cannot be awarded oral distinctions.
- We are exploring at present offering 3-year degrees at the UCAS stage. A change to offering 3-year versions of our programmes alongside our 4-year programmes could encourage the uptake of languages even in times like these, where such uncertainty circulates around the possibilities of travel and cultural exchange that come with language learning. In order to overcome the QAA benchmark we are considering this option for non-beginners, who will go to our summer school at the end of year one and we are exploring options for the summer of year 2.
- The programme specification requires the students to take a language module achieving C1 in their core language(s). Programmes without named languages - so including 'BA Modern Languages' - are more flexible in terms of the QAA subject benchmark statement, but we do make it clear to students that they may not achieve the same level of fluency as on the 4-year degree.

Significantly, one institution reported having previously only run 3-year programmes, with the second year spent abroad (and credits transferred from modules taken at partner institutions). These programmes ended in 2019 and have been replaced by 4-year programmes. This decision was taken because students were found to be insufficiently prepared for their final-year modules as they had not acquired the necessary academic skills.

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Responding institutions:

1. Aberystwyth University
2. Aston University
3. Bangor University
4. University of Bath
5. University of Birmingham
6. University of Bristol
7. Cambridge University
8. Cardiff University
9. University of Central Lancashire
10. University of Chester
11. De Montfort University
12. Durham University
13. University of East Anglia
14. University of Edinburgh
15. University of Essex
16. University of Exeter
17. University of Glasgow
18. University of Kent
19. King's College London
20. University of Leeds
21. University of Leicester
22. University of Liverpool
23. Newcastle University
24. University of Nottingham
25. Open University
26. University of Oxford
27. University of Portsmouth
28. Queen Mary, University of London
29. Queen's University Belfast
30. University of Reading
31. Royal Holloway, University of London
32. Sheffield Hallam University
33. University of Southampton
34. University of St Andrews
35. University of Stirling
36. Swansea University
37. University of Warwick
38. University of Westminster
39. University of York
40. York St John University