

Item 4: Vice Chair Languages & Intercultural Education

This reviews activities since the last meeting and starts with the most recent UCAS statistics.

1. The Languages landscape

• 2020 UCAS end of Cycle Report

UCAS released end of cycle data on the 16th December, 2020 (a report focussing key trends in WP and sector wide data resources) which I reported on at the January meeting and they published further provider level data on the 4th February, 2021.

Subject data is available for both HECOS and JACS codes. HECOS (Higher Education Classification of Subjects) uses the Common Aggregation Hierarchy¹ (CAH) to 'provide a standardised hierarchical aggregation of HECOS codes suitable for the majority of uses'. CAH19 covers Language and Area Studies and is further sub-divided into English Studies (CAH19-01), Celtic Studies (CAH-02) and **Languages, Linguistics and Classics (CAH19-03)**. The latter is then further sub-divided into 11 sub-groups from CAH19-03-01, (French studies) to CAH19-03-11 (others in language and area studies). The broad nature of the main CAH code does not seem particularly helpful to our subject area although the HECOS 'subject code identifiers'² themselves are relatively fine-grained at subject level and may provide useful data if this is reported. The CAH19 data shows³ that there was a drop in accepted applicants from **21,135 in 2019 to 20,195 in 2020** (-4.5%). These are the first two years for which HECOS is being used so the data should show a useful but very broad picture over time.

The JACS code data (see below) shows substantial drops in accepted applicant numbers for Groups Q, R and T over the ten years between 2011 and 2020. **There has been a decrease of just over 25% in Linguistics, Classics and related subject numbers, a 36% decrease in European languages, literature and related subject numbers and 37% in non-European Languages, literature and related subjects.**

Subject group (JACS3)	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Group Q Linguistics, Classics & related	12,635	12,030	12,460	12,525	12,575	12,245	11,745	10,840	10,240	9,465
Group R European Langs, Lit & related	4,570	4,065	4,005	3,780	3,820	3,505	3,425	3,060	2,935	2,920
Group T Non-European Langs, Lit and related	1,440	1,235	1,255	1,115	1,265	1,145	1,095	985	1,045	905

Despite the negative picture that these trends suggest, around single honours language degrees in particular, the recently published (July 2021) UCML / British Academy report, *Granular Trends in Modern Languages in UCAS Admissions Data, 2012-18* goes a long way to counter the prevailing narrative of decline in our subject area since it looks beyond the main JACS codes R and T to include

¹ <https://www.hesa.ac.uk/support/documentation/hecos/cah-list>

² <https://www.hesa.ac.uk/support/documentation/hecos>

³ <https://www.ucas.com/data-and-analysis/undergraduate-statistics-and-reports/ucas-undergraduate-end-cycle-data-resources-2020/2020-entry-provider-level-end-cycle-data-resources>

degrees with a language component. This report indicates a much more nuanced picture of language take-up and provision providing insight into the changing pattern of languages in combination with other subject areas.

- **The Survey of Language Provision in UK Universities in 2021**

We have worked closely with AULC for this year's annual survey to build on the themes covered in previous years' surveys and the report was published in July. We received 57 completed surveys from 53 HEIs in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. Of these institutions, 49 offer degree programmes in languages, while the other 4 deliver Institution wide language programmes (IWLPs) only. Further research suggests that modern language provision is available in 91 UK institutions, of which 71 offer degree programmes and 81 offer IWLPs. Key points from the survey around language provision indicate that:

- French, Spanish and German remain the dominant languages on degree programmes;
- The rise of Chinese is confirmed taking fourth place ahead of Italian for the first time;
- Russian and Portuguese have seen a significant increase over previous surveys;
- The ab initio language offer, explored for the first time, is widespread with most HEIs offering most languages from beginner level on degree programmes;
- If languages are not available ab initio, statistically they are more likely to be French and German, but several institutions report plans to start offering them;
- The average number of languages offered per institution is 7, slightly up on the 6.4 of previous surveys;
- IWLP language provision is similar but slightly more extensive, possibly with some underreporting;
- After a period of growth, IWLP provision remains healthy and seemingly stable but with some issues for concern reported;
- There are ongoing moves towards integration of IWLP provision within academic departments, although yet neither widespread nor consistent.

The rest of the report reports on how we as a sector have dealt with COVID and its impact on our practice. It also looks at the impact of Brexit and how both COVID and Brexit have impacted on residence abroad. It provides a fascinating insight into this period and also demonstrates the resilience that the sector has shown.

2. Promoting Languages

- **Routes into Languages**

Building on a question in last year's annual survey, we asked this year whether HEIs were contemplating expanding their activities in the area and there is much positive feedback on this. 14 HEIs respond 'that they are fully committed to Routes already' whilst 14 would like to expand their activities in this area. A further 14 indicate that they might like to do this. We plan to contact these universities to ask how they would plan to take their activities forward and whether they would like to join a local network of Routes HEIs – it should of course be highlighted that there is no further funding at this point. The UCML Routes Committee continues to meet every three months and the hope is to develop more activities in common such as the training of UG ambassadors.

- **National Centre for CLIL: Learning through Languages UK**

I attend the regular meetings of this group on behalf of UCML. There has been a series of 'expert' seminars this year focussing on CLIL which have been very well attended by teachers. The full series of CLIL Monday seminars can be seen on the website

(<https://learningthroughlanguages.org.uk/2020/10/15/clil-mondays/>).

- **Gender Action** (<https://www.genderaction.co.uk/>)

I am on the steering group for GA and attend their regular meetings. DECSY (Development Education South Yorkshire) has now taken over the management of the GA project since no other options have come forward. As one of the founding members, UCML has signed the transfer of IPR to DECSY. There has been little activity around the **Gender Action Schools Award** since the beginning of the pandemic and there is an ongoing discussion around future funding sources to take the GA programme forward. It may be timely to do more to address the issue of **gender imbalance in our own subject areas** since the UCAS end of cycle reports contain comprehensive data which we could use to inform our actions. The potential of this is illustrated below for 4 randomly chosen JACS language related codes.

2007	Q1 - Linguistics	Men	95
2007	Q1 - Linguistics	Women	275
2020	Q1 - Linguistics	Men	115
2020	Q1 - Linguistics	Women	400
2007	R4 - Spanish studies	Men	105
2007	R4 - Spanish studies	Women	210
2020	R4 - Spanish studies	Men	55
2020	R4 - Spanish studies	Women	135
2007	T1 - Chinese studies	Men	75
2007	T1 - Chinese studies	Women	60
2020	T1 - Chinese studies	Men	45
2020	T1 - Chinese studies	Women	65
2007	Y - Combs of phys/math science with arts/humanities/languages	Men	1760
2007	Y - Combs of phys/math science with arts/humanities/languages	Women	1190
2020	Y - Combs of phys/math science with arts/humanities/languages	Men	570
2020	Y - Combs of phys/math science with arts/humanities/languages	Women	460

3. Other activities

- **GCSE MFL content review**

I took the lead in developing UCML's response to the DfE's revised subject content review for GCSE MFL in French, German and Spanish, in consultation with other subject associations. This was submitted by the deadline of the 19th May with a letter outlining our concerns about the plans sent to the DfE. We have now had a response from the DfE, inviting us to meet with them at some point.

The aims of the revised content were broad⁴ and included provision for a 'strong linguistic and cultural foundation for students who go on to study MFL at a higher level post-16' but the specifications were much more more specifically linguistic and referred to three main areas: 1. the **acquisition of vocabulary**, 2. **mastery of the specified grammar** in terms of both fluency and accuracy in 'oral and written modalities', and 3. **knowledge of sound / spelling relationships together with 'clear and comprehensible pronunciation'**. For the first time, the number of words that students should know would be specified: **1,200 lexical items for foundation tier**, and a **further 500 lexical items for higher tier**. Many subject associations have expressed grave concern around the restrictive nature of these proposals and the lack of specified cultural content in its broadest sense.

More recently, OFSTED (June 2021) have released the *Curriculum Research Review Report: Languages*. The report describes the Government's concern that numbers taking Languages as part of the EBacc are low and outlines the reasons for this. In a major section on curriculum progression, it then goes on to 'introduce the idea that the **building blocks of a language system are sounds, words**

⁴ https://consult.education.gov.uk/ebacc-and-arts-and-humanities-team/gcse-mfl-subject-content-review/supporting_documents/GCSE%20MFL%20subject%20content%20document.pdf

and rules about how these connect to create sentences and meanings (phonics, vocabulary, grammar)'. The research presented supports many of the recent GCSE curriculum proposals.

VW July, 2021