

Item 6: Report of the Vice-Chair, Engagement & External Communications

9th July 2021

1. Social Media:

Our twitter following has increased to 4670, up approx. 350 since January, and our Facebook page now has around 2140 likes. This has been sustained by active campaigning on behalf of the sector, the release of key reports, as well as the establishment of some active networks under the aegis of UCML including the ECA network.

2. The UCML ECA network have now set up their own separate twitter feed @UCML_ECA, please do follow if you are on twitter, and have a dedicated area of the UCML website. Emma and Marcela are in regular touch with the group to discuss and publicise activities. Recently we have met to discuss the ECA survey and possible charter. Our understanding now is that the ECA SIG will launch not a 'charter' as such but a best practice guide since UCML does not have charter mark status. This is under development. We are very much looking forward to the ECA symposium on 15th July which will include a number of training activities and sessions including how to revise and resubmit articles and write grant proposals. Thanks to co-chairs Dr Dominique Carlini Versini and Dr Hilary Potter, also to Dr Liam Lewis, UCML ECA rep, as well as the whole committee.
3. Our New UCML JISC discussion list has 185 subscribers and counting! The former mailing list will cease operating on 14th July 2021.

So far in 2021 the website has received 18,097 views from 9,942 unique visitors.

National representation and/or support

1. We launched two major joint reports on Monday 5th July which have had a significant impact on social media and elsewhere:

The first, the UCAS granularity report was launched with the British Academy: <https://university-council-modern-languages.org/2021/07/05/ucml-and-british-academy-ucas-report/>

We had good press interest, and an article appeared in the Times Higher, quoting both our Associations and focusing on the more positive points in the report especially with regard to the broadening and diversification of the discipline and languages uptake. James and I collaborated over the press coverage with Sean Canty, the Press Officer at the British Academy, and other press contacts.

<https://www.timeshighereducation.com/news/overall-languages-decline-masking-slight-growth-some-areas>

The second was a joint UCML-AULC Survey: <https://university-council-modern-languages.org/2021/07/05/ucml-aulc-survey-2021/>

Again, very good level of interest in this, and possible leads from the Guardian among other outlets. We'll continue to pursue these.

We had previously given an interview to **University Business Magazine** in March about the significance of UCAS data for languages and the apparent declines in applications for modern languages, following the spate of articles on this topic in the press in February and March which appeared to show huge declines in numbers for certain Universities. We were very keen to temper this messaging and be more positive about the ways in which languages have to an extent 'reinvented' their disciplines in order to thrive in a difficult climate. The article can be accessed here:

<https://universitybusiness.co.uk/features/degrees-in-danger/>

2. **British Council and #handsoffbritishcouncil**

James and I met with representatives from the British Council and PCS (the Union that represents their staff) on 30th June. The outcome of the meeting can be summarised as follows:

Funding for the British Council in the shape of a £100 million 'futures' loan was received from the Government in 2020 following our social media campaign on behalf of the Council, and in response to huge pressure at this time from the whole sector. It has emerged that there are conditions with the loan which relate to restructuring, introducing cuts of between 15 and 20%, equating to around 2000 staff, across all programmes and sections of the Council. This week sees the start of the formal consultation regarding redundancies. This will proceed area by area.

CF. Minister Nigel Adams' statements in an urgent Parliamentary session on the British Council: <https://www.parallelparliament.co.uk/mp/nigel-adams/debate/Commons/2021-06-08/debates/25D780FC-924C-438F-A181-4AB111C5B9E6/BritishCouncil>

A PCS campaign is being shaped to explain the impact of these cuts on the current and future work of the British Council, in the form of a

#HandsOffBritishCouncil campaign. The aim is to halt the redundancy processes and call for closer scrutiny/examination of the Government's loan.

Potential UCML actions for discussion:

- Re-activate social media campaign, this time focused on the 'HandsOff' approach.
- Contacting politicians (PCS have already done some of this)
- Alerting colleagues in the ELT community (e.g. English Association, UKALTA)
- Alerting colleagues across the sector (via UCML Plenary/AGM, BA/Strategic Committee for Languages in HE, IMLR, AULC, AHA)
- Sharing the Early Day Motion and eventual petition
- Possible meeting between PCS and interested/concerned stakeholders
- Alerting contact at GCHQ and APPG in ML

Tom Dearing noted that at the moment the Assistantship Programme is seemingly unaffected, but this may change. Should this happen he will alert us.

It would be useful to gauge the appetite of the meeting for engagement here. At the moment we are still waiting for a draft document to use for any press and social media engagement.

Related links:

<https://www.pcs.org.uk/news-events/news/two-thousand-job-cuts-proposed-british-council>

<https://www.britishcouncil.org/british-council-future>

Emma Cayley, July
2021.