

# UCML Executive Committee

Friday 12 November 2021 10am-12pm

Via MS Teams



## Item 10i: Slavonic & East European studies

This is a report on Slavonic and East European (SEE) Languages in UK Higher Education, covering the period May – November 2021. This report is based on consultation with the British Association of Slavonic and East European Studies (BASEES) and with academics in the field.

### 1. COVID-19

The Covid-19 pandemic continues to cause uncertainty for our field. Flights between the UK and Russia resumed in late spring 2021, meaning that some students of Russian were able to go to Russia for the final weeks of their Year Abroad. In some cases, students were able to visit other Russian-speaking countries. Students of Russian doing their Year Abroad in 2021-22 have also been able to travel to Russia in the autumn. Many researchers were also able to travel during the summer period. However, case numbers in Russia remain high and in late October, a local lockdown was introduced in Moscow. The picture throughout central and eastern Europe remains mixed.

In the UK, most institutions resumed on-campus teaching in the autumn. Many students and staff are finding the current academic year to be easier. However, Covid-19 rates also remain high in the UK and a return to hybrid or online models cannot be ruled out.

### 2. The Turing Scheme

A number of universities have been successful in securing Turing funding for students of Slavonic and East European languages in 2021-22. The Turing scheme is generally seen as limited in comparison to Erasmus, which has been lost. However, one notable advantage of the Turing scheme is that it allows for travel outside the EU / Erasmus area, meaning that it is possible to secure funding for students travelling to Russia, which was not possible under the Erasmus scheme.

However, the first round of Turing funding was for one year only, meaning that universities will have to apply again for future years. There is a risk that the scheme will be downgraded or restricted in the future. A multi-year funding offer would help provide security for the field (not only for SEE languages, but modern languages as a whole).

### 3. BASEES Strategic Review

In spring 2021, I reported that BASEES is conducting a strategic review of the organization. A survey of the membership (and of academics in the field who might join) was carried out in the summer, with a particular focus on equality, diversity, and inclusion issues. A subcommittee, led by Dr Alison Long, has been formed to interpret the results of that survey. The survey results will feed into 'BASEES Strategy 2030', details of which will be announced formally at the BASEES conference next spring.

### 4. Other news from BASEES

BASEES is planning to host an in-person conference on 8-10 April 2022 in Robinson College, Cambridge. This will be the first conference since 2019. While the majority of panels will be in-person, a small number of panels will be held online, particularly for overseas scholars who are unable to travel.

In lieu of a conference, BASEES has run a successful programme of online events throughout 2021, including events aimed at early-career academics and postgraduate students.

The BASEES Study Group for Minority History held its inaugural online symposium in June 2021. In October, the group launched a podcast series focusing on the history of minorities and minority experiences in twentieth-century central and eastern Europe.

The BASEES Nineteenth-Century Study Group hosted a hybrid conference on 'Russian Nihilism as a Literary Project' in October 2021.

BASEES sent an open letter to Goldsmiths, University of London, in October 2021 to express its concerns about proposed redundancies in History, English, and Creative Writing. Goldsmiths has been home to a number of major scholars in Slavonic and East European studies over the years.

BASEES issued a statement of solidarity with DOXA, an independent student-run journal in Russia. Russian police raided DOXA offices and arrested the journal's four editors in April 2021. BASEES notes the chilling effect for media in Russia, and that DOXA have been a strong voice for academic freedom and critical thinking.

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