

UCML Executive Committee

12 November 2021

10am-12pm



Item 3: Chair's report

Since taking up the role of Chair of UCML at the beginning of August, I have concentrated on getting to grips with the scope of the role, the workings of UCML, and making contact with relevant colleagues and stakeholders to discuss the shape of the languages landscape and possible future involvement for UCML in a number of projects and ventures.

Until end September I was also carrying out the role of VC EE and Comms. James and I met with Rachel Hall, Education Correspondent for the Guardian to discuss issues with delayed Turing allocations and bureaucracy that was preventing students from taking up their YA placements. This led to an article published in September:

<https://www.theguardian.com/education/2021/sep/01/thousands-of-british-students-in-limbo-with-post-brexit-visa-chaos>

[Fransiska and James will take forward the article that Rachel was preparing on Turing with us.]

1/ UCML internal structure: We were delighted to be able to appoint a new VC Research, thanking Jo very sincerely for her work, and we are pleased that Liz has already hit the ground running and will be focussing on highlighting this key part of our activity. Equally, we are delighted to welcome Fransiska as VC EE and Comms, and Marián as Honorary Treasurer. With so many new role holders, and covid keeping us all distant, frequent communication has become increasingly crucial, so that we are all kept up to speed with UCML's activities, and that we all feel we have a well-defined part to play. James Illingworth, who has done such an incredible job as Project Coordinator for us, will be stepping down from this role at end December 2021, and we are delighted that he has agreed to assume the running of the Year Abroad SIG which will be the focus of considerable activity in the coming year (see later in report). We will therefore be appointing a new Administrative Assistant/Project Coordinator from January 2021, with an advert to go out shortly. We would ask all Exec members please to disseminate the advert widely once it is released as this really is a very important position for the smooth running of UCML.

2/ What's in a name? UCML/IMLR relationship

Charles Burdett (IMLR) and I met in early August to discuss a closer relationship between the IMLR and UCML. Liz, and where possible I, will sit on IMLR committee meetings, and we have invited Charles to join the Executive Committee as an honorary member. He will plan to attend at least one meeting a year. I hope that this will help to cement the relationship between the two organisations, and further deepen understanding of UCML as an organisation. While we are very aware of what we stand for and what we do, we discussed how the organisation could be better known within the disciplinary community, and our meetings better attended by the ML professoriate among others (I also spoke to Mike Kelly to gain an understanding of the origins of UCML and the perception of our organisation in the wider ML community). This will be another of my priorities.

- Charles and I also spoke about the legacy of OWRI and ensuring the projects remain in the public consciousness, and that their benefits are amplified. Liz is taking forward this work on behalf of UCML.
- The newly launched UKRI AHRC initiative to fund two [Future of Language Research Fellows](#) (closing date 26th Oct) to conduct horizon scanning and gap analysis to inform the future of possible AHRC investment in languages research is an important development, extending the scope of OWRI, and of the AHRC Languages Fellow appointment (Janice Carruthers), and one that UCML should keep closely abreast of. I have already spoken to candidates hoping to apply for these positions and Liz and I will remain in close correspondence with the appointed fellows in due course. I attended an AHRC scoping meeting to discuss interdisciplinarity in Modern Languages in August prior to the announcement of the investment in these fellowships.

We discussed the terminology of ‘Modern’ Languages and agree that thought needs to be given in the community to how we define our disciplinary field. When the field emerged, it was largely named ‘Modern’ to differentiate itself from Classics. MFL is still the standard designation for pre-18 languages education. If we could start again from scratch – how would we name ourselves, and are we describing what we do in a way that encourages or discourages community and identity? We are acutely aware of the need to bear recruitment in mind here. Charles and I have agreement from John Gill at **THE** to write an op ed on these issues for our disciplinary field.

3/ What’s in a name ii: relationship with Classical Association and Council of Classics Departments; Towards a National Languages Strategy and British Academy relationship

Following the DfE announcement of further funding for the Modern Foreign Language Pedagogy Pilot, a scheme launched and managed by the National Centre for Excellence for Language Pedagogy, continued funding of £16.4 million for the Mandarin Excellence programme and new funding for a Latin Excellence programme (£4 million), and some local controversy around the relative value of the Classics and Modern Languages, we put out a [joint statement](#) of solidarity with the Classical Association, underlining the fact that these pilot initiatives are welcome initial steps towards the wider suite of medium- to long-term actions recommended in the 2020 [Towards a National Languages Strategy: Education and Skills](#) by a coalition of organisations (British Academy, Arts and Humanities Research Council, Association of School and College Leaders, British Council, Universities UK). As we say in the statement, ‘**TNLS** proposed urgent, concerted and coordinated action at all levels to reverse the persistent decline in take up of languages in the UK. Seeking to build on existing initiatives and increase their impact, the strategy highlighted the success of the Mandarin Excellence Programme and the potential to introduce similar intensive schemes for other languages, with a focus on areas of multiple deprivation and low language-learning uptake.

We jointly welcome the Government’s recognition of the benefits and strategic importance of language education and the investment in both modern and ancient languages, including lesser taught languages. Together with the languages community across the UK, we are actively engaged in further discussion, sharing research and lobbying to extend the benefits, reach, and scope of these programmes and to capitalise on such policy engagements as the TORCH Knowledge Exchange Fellowship on ancient languages education and the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) Open World Research Initiative projects (OWRI) which demonstrate the

importance of multilingualism. We are committed to continued cooperation, to promote and secure language learning for all.'

Neil Kenny, Lead Fellow for Languages at the British Academy and I have met to discuss ongoing initiatives together, following on from TNLS. The Chair of UCML and Neil have co-Chaired the **Strategic Committee on Languages in Higher Education**. Neil has passed his Chairing responsibilities this year to Charles Forsdick, with whom I have now spoken to discuss the next meeting of the group.

- Among other initiatives, this group is overseeing the implantation of the Languages Portal UK, provisionally to be hosted on the BA website, commissioning the gathering of data (e.g. data on cold spots which may be developing in HE language provision, enabling us to develop a rolling geographical picture of particular languages offered and not offered).
- Need to keep an eye on original **TNLS** recommendations to ensure they are still being implemented.
- MFL mentoring – UCML might think about preparing information for the sector.
- Closer relationship between UCML and the APPG MFL. I attended a meeting of the APPG MFL in September and have been invited to present at a Language Show panel discussion chaired by the APPG MFL on Friday Nov 12th on zoom on 'What next for language policy in the UK').

4/ **QAA**. The QAA Subject Benchmark Statement for Languages, Cultures and Societies and for Linguistics is due for renewal in 2022. Andy Smith of QAA asked us to nominate candidates for Chair and Deputy Chair, and later for the advisory board. We received several expressions of interest in the Chair/Deputy Chair positions and forwarded these to the QAA. The new Chair and Deputy will be announced soon. We have also forwarded our nominations for the Advisory Group which includes proposed representation from the UCML Steering Group.

5/ **Routes into Languages** – we look forward to a meeting with Vicky and representatives from remaining Routes hubs in late November. The Routes West Midlands is sadly no longer in operation – Emmanuelle Labeau has possible connections to follow up on that. The management of the Routes Yorkshire and The Humber region will be transferred to Leeds from Hull and the WP coordinator at Leeds has already met with reps from York, York St John, and Leeds Beckett to take this forward and form a new committee.

We would like to allocate UCML funds to pay a central UK Routes coordinator. We feel that this would be an excellent investment to breathe new life into the network which is now so important to coordinate access and outreach efforts across the UK. It would be very useful to have the Steering Group's view on this possibility, as we do have the funds to support it.

6/ **GCHQ**:

We have developed a good relationship with the Head of Languages Engagement at GCHQ. GCHQ will be an important partner in helping to coordinate effort across the languages community and government. They currently run a Cross-Whitehall language group bringing together managers from FCDO, Cabinet Office, DfE, BEIS, Ministry of Justice etc. They have input into the Languages Portal UK project. GCHQ has been invited to join the Strategic Committee for Languages in HE; and also the QAA SBS advisory group as a key graduate employer.

7/ AULC:

I have met with Mark Critchley of the AULC to discuss our ongoing collaboration. He confirms that we will want to continue for at least this next year with the joint survey. Among other issues we discussed the value of IWLPs and the widespread misunderstanding of these in the languages community and the need to reframe the narrative. We can perhaps engage in further discussion of ways to go about this with our IWLP rep.

8/ Future of the Year Abroad?

The pandemic has caused many institutions to re-evaluate their relationship with residence abroad as a compulsory part of an ML degree. Our YA SIG has contributed to many discussions on this and other topics and has gathered important data for the sector. Need to rethink YA nationally? If we were starting from scratch, is this how language degrees would look? Do we still need residence abroad – do we need to rethink all these questions? We have trodden this ground before but the ground has now shifted considerably since we last issued YA advice to the sector (<https://university-council-modern-languages.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/Valuing-year-abroad.pdf>). We encounter increasingly difficult issues: of EDI, of logistics (i.e. visas and bureaucracy, let alone Turing vs Erasmus +). Are there alternative ways of getting similar benefits? How do we decolonise the Year Abroad? This may be the time to do some joined-up thinking across the sector, led by our YA SIG, in conversation with the Year Abroad Network. Can we put on a workshop/series of workshops to deal with these questions? Should we devote a plenary to this – winter/summer?

9/ **Charitable status for UCML:** this discussion was originally prompted by the transfer of Routes to UCML. Currently we have no legal protection as we are an unincorporated organisation, and as individuals that makes us liable for any legal action against UCML or financial debt that may accrue. We are considering moving to gain charitable incorporated status and are in the process of trying to understand what this may mean and whether it is desirable for us. We welcome any advice or thoughts on this from the wider Exec. Some other comparable organisations have this status; others don't (ALL, SFS are charities for example). Marián and I will meet with an advisor to take this forward, and I am very grateful for all her advice about this process.

Events attended on behalf of UCML (see report for attendance at regular meetings)

Reading Innoconf round table presentation on the Future Shape of Modern Languages, 17th September.

Future events: APPG round table, 12th November, 2-4pm.

IMLR/UCML conference – will discuss further with Charles B and Marcela

Winter Plenary? Future of the Year Abroad or disciplinary identity and naming as possible topics.