

## UCML business meeting

Friday 14 January 2022, 10am-12pm



### Item 3a: Chair's report

Since taking up the role of Chair of UCML at the beginning of August 2021 from Claire Gorrara, 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.

I would like formally to welcome those members who have joined us since the AGM 2021, and to thank and bid farewell to those who have come to the end of roles:

#### New reps since AGM 2021:

Liz Wren-Owens, VC Research

Fransiska Louwagie, VC External Engagement & Comms

Marián Arribas-Tomé, Hon. Treasurer

Ed Welch, Scotland and UCMLS

Carlos Sanz Mingo, Wales

Ursula Lanvers, Linguistics

Binhua Wang, East Asian

Sarah Bowden, Germanic & Low Countries

#### Today's Business Meeting is the final meeting for:

Allyson Fiddler, Germanic & Low Countries

Frances Weightman, Area Studies

James Illingworth, Project Coordinator (in this role)

#### Other members who have stepped down since AGM:

Claire Gorrara, Chair

Jo Drugan, VC Research

Olga Gomez-Cash, Hon. Treasurer

Jo Carson, Scotland and UCMLS

Federico Faloppa, Linguistics

Derek Hird, East Asian

1/ **UCML appointments and departures:** We were delighted to be able to appoint a new VC Research, thanking **Jo Drugan** very sincerely for her work. **Liz Wren-Owens** has already made a huge impact in this role and is focussing on further highlighting this key part of our activity. Equally, we are delighted to welcome **Fransiska Louwagie** as VC EE and Comms, and **Marián Arribas-Tomé** as Honorary Treasurer, thanking **Olga Gomez-Cash** for her wonderful contribution.

**James Illingworth**, who has done such an incredible job as Project Coordinator for us, will be stepping down from this role at the end of January 2022, 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, beginning with our plenary for which James must take all the credit for organising. We will therefore be appointing a new Executive Assistant shortly; we are currently in the process of shortlisting. There was a huge amount of interest in this post, and perhaps largely as James has made such a success of the role. UCML really cannot thank him enough for his energy, dedication, and attention to detail. Last but not most assuredly not least, as this is the first business meeting since **Claire Gorrara** stepped down as Chair, I would like to pay tribute to her tireless devotion to the promotion of UCML's work, and her continued advocacy for languages and cultures. The phrase standing on the shoulders of giants is overused, however I think it is appropriate in this case. I have learned such a lot from Claire, as have we all, and UCML is as successful today as it is largely because of her ambition and vision for us. I am in awe of what she has achieved and will strive to follow her example in ensuring that UCML continues to serve the sector in the ways it needs us to, and to push for policy changes.

**Routes into Languages Coordinator UK:** Vicky Wright and I are drafting an advert for a UK-wide coordinator to help relaunch RiL activity. We would ask all our members please to disseminate the advert widely once it is released as this really is a very important position for the smooth running of RiL.

2/ 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-brex-it-visa-chaos>

[Fransiska and James will take forward the article that Rachel was preparing on Turing with us, and please see Fransiska's report for further details of media pieces.]

### 3/ **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 (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](#) 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. 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.

One question which has arisen in discussion with the IMLR, the British Academy, and others, is the issue of the distinctiveness of our disciplinary field and its wider reception. We suggest that further thought needs to be given in the community to how we continue to define ourselves. When the field emerged, it was largely named ‘Modern’ Languages to differentiate itself from Classics and other overlapping fields such as English. MFL is still the standard designation for pre-18 languages education with that arguably problematic ‘F’. We are acutely aware of the need to bear recruitment in mind here, the pipeline from primary and secondary, and additional funding which may follow the more practice-based dimension of our disciplines in contrast with Classics and English for example.

Charles and I have agreement from John Gill at **THE** to write an op ed on these issues for our disciplinary field.

#### **4/ Relationship with Classical Association and Council of Classics Departments (CUCD); *Towards a National Languages Strategy*, and UCML-British Academy relationship (Strategic Committee on Languages in Higher Education; Languages Advisory Group)**

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 (SCLHE)**. 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. As UCML Chair I also sit on the British Academy **Languages Advisory Group** whose purpose is to advise the Academy's Lead Fellow for Languages and the HE & Skills Policy Team on the delivery of their programme of work on Languages.

- 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).
- The groups have underlined the 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 presented at a Language Show panel discussion chaired by the APPG MFL on Friday Nov 12<sup>th</sup> on zoom on 'What next for language policy in the UK').

5/ **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 **Nigel Harkness** (Newcastle) and **Ed Welch** (Aberdeen), our own UCMLS Chair. We have also forwarded our nominations for the Advisory Group which includes proposed representation from the UCML Steering Group. The advisory groups for LCS and for Linguistics are due to be announced next week.

6/ **Routes into Languages** – I have now attended a meeting of the network with Vicky and representatives from Routes hubs. Vicky's report contains more detail here, however it's worth noting that we are very invested in relaunching Routes, and to finding further funding for it. As she notes, we now have representation across all the English regions as well as Routes Cymru, NICILT and SCILT. To this end we have decided to allocate UCML funds to pay a central UK Routes coordinator. We judged 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.

7/ **DfE:** In early January 2022, the VC Education and I were invited to a discussion with representatives from the DfE policy team for languages (**Laura Church, Hannah Jack and Philip Denley**). We invited **Rene Koglbauer** of ALL/UCML to join us. The policy team explained that our meeting forms part of a scoping exercise whereby they will discuss primary languages with a range of stakeholders. They mentioned that the new Minister of State for School Standards, Robin Walker, is very committed to languages, and especially in the context of social cohesion and access. We had a very positive discussion, and they have requested regular meetings with us. This will be a very important conduit for us to engage with language policy. We suggested that the RiL network might provide a very useful framework for establishing UK-wide projects.

8/ **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 and other strategic committees and groups for languages.

9/ **AULC:** I have met with Mark Critchley of the AULC to discuss our ongoing collaboration. We would like to continue for at least 2022 with the publication of a joint survey of provision across the sector. Among other issues we discussed the value of IWLPs, the widespread misunderstanding of these, and the need to reframe the narrative. We will discuss further with our IWLP rep.

10/ **Future of the Year Abroad:** The pandemic has caused many institutions to reevaluate 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 (ie 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*. **James Illingworth**, as the new lead for our Year Abroad SIG is kick-starting this New Year with just such a debate this afternoon at the Winter Plenary. We hope that you will be able to attend.

11/ **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. Some other comparable organisations have this status; others don't (ALL, SFS are charities for example). Marián, Vicky and I will meet with Rene, and a financial advisor to take this forward and I am very grateful for all Marián's advice about this process. We aim to bring a proposal to the AGM in the summer.

12/ **Head of School Special Interest Group:** We would like to propose creating a new Special Interest Group within UCML for the Head of Schools/Departments network that has previously

met independently. We have already had an expression of interest in leading this group and would welcome thoughts on this proposal from our membership. Our feeling is that it would complement our current SIGs and offer a source of valuable information about the health of the sector as well as alerting us to any live issues which we would then be more able to help with in a timely fashion.

13/ **Summer Plenary** – we would like to propose a hybrid event with some level of gathering in person – perhaps for the panel/round table participants at the least. As this will be post-REF result, the plenary is likely to focus on research topics. Any thoughts and suggestions are welcomed.

At some point we propose a plenary session or round table on ML careers, following discussions with **Mike Orlov** of the National Register for Professional Service Interpreters, and others.