

UCML Executive Committee

Friday 2 November 2018 12.30 – 16.00
Monnet Room, Europe House
32 Smith Square, London SW1P 3EU



Report from Northern Ireland

In preparing this report I was in contact with the Heads of Spanish, French and Irish at Queen's University Belfast, Professor Barr, University of Ulster and Ian Collen, NICILT (The Northern Ireland Centre for Information on Language Teaching and Research) as well as with my predecessor Professor John Gillespie, Professors Janice Carruthers and Isabel Torres (both in the School of Arts, English and Languages at Queen's University Belfast).

The following issues were raised as cause for concern:

1) Attracting students to study languages

- Northern Ireland remains the only part of the UK where children do not have an entitlement to learn a language as part of the Key Stage 2 primary curriculum;
- GCSE and A-level examinations from Northern Ireland's own Awarding Body, CCEA, are regulated by CCEA Regulation. OFQUAL no longer applies in Northern Ireland. This means that adjustments to grade boundaries at English Awarding Bodies at A-level because of native speakers and 'severe-grading', have not been replicated at CCEA.
- Evidence from the Community of Practice suggests that the new CCEA GCSE in French/German/Irish/Spanish for first teaching from September 2017 is proving challenging in non-selective schools, due to the introduction of translation at this level. The social divide in language learning appears to be getting starker.
- Entry criteria for Modern Languages at QUB is currently ABB at A-level. With the closure of languages at the University of Ulster, this entry tariff could add to the perception in post-primary schools that languages are only for the most able.

2) Brexit-related risks

- How secure is the future of the Erasmus programme post-Brexit? What steps are being / might be taken to protect the scheme?

3) Safeguarding the future of Modern Languages

- As we see more "downsizing" and closures in Modern Languages across the UK could UCML undertake to compare the current picture at 3rd level to say 10 years ago and present analysis of this data in an attempt to try to stop further closures?
- As we are increasingly asked to contribute to interdisciplinary degrees and teaching are Modern Languages staff and programmes receiving recognition of their contributions? What "credit", for example, do colleagues at different institutions get for work on degrees such as Law and a language? Are these numbers recognised in admissions figures, course load information etc? If the tension between contributing to interdisciplinary degrees and building numbers on core BA courses is widespread, then do we need a collective, national, response/strategy?

The following positive developments were noted:

- 1) National Languages Strategy.** There is a 5-way MoU between the British Academy, AHRC, the British Council, ASCL and UUK involving a series of workshops and roundtables that will work towards a national languages strategy for the UK. The five bodies will all work together towards a national strategy, with the devolved strategies strongly plugged into the overarching national strategy.
- 2) Routes into Languages.** There is an initiative under way whereby the AHRC (through the 4 OWRI projects and my LF project) will fund some Routes Ambassadors activity around the UK, including NI (even though NI was never part of Routes).
- 3) Language Trends Report.** Thanks to Ian Collens' intervention, a Language Trends Report will now be produced for NI by the British Council and Teresa Tinsley. Wales is about to get its first report so the NI one is timely.
- 4) Meeting with Principals and Heads of ML in NI.** Ian Collen initiated a meeting with school Principals in June around the sustainability of German. Ian, Janice Carruthers, the Head of the Goethe Institute and Embassy representatives from London had a very useful discussion with NI School Principals which is continuing in various forms to see if measures can be taken to help sustainability.

Sarah Bowskill, NI representative
October 2018