UCML Summer Plenary
10th July 2020, 10:00–16:30 by Teams/Zoom

Item 4: VC Languages & Intercultural Education Report

This report outlines my activities since the last plenary meeting and also useful reports which have been published in the languages and related studies area. The headings follow the categories that appeared in my last report.

1. **Access to data**
   UCAS data
   - No doubt news from UCAS [1] (25th June), following the **June 18th deadline for university acceptances in the 2019 / 20 UG application round,** should be treated cautiously, but we should perhaps welcome the fact that more applicants this year are choosing to accept their offer rather than defer for a year despite concerns about the impact of COVID 19. In their analysis of the 15th January 2020 application deadline, UCAS[2] had reported an overall increase in applications of 1.2% over the previous year despite the fact that 2020 had 'been projected to be the final year of a UK-wide decline in the overall number of 18 year olds in the total population'. Nevertheless, analysis of subject trends showed **a further fall in applications for Languages and Area Studies of 4,330 (or -6.6%** over the previous cycle. Also in the Arts and Humanities area, Historical, philosophical, and religious studies saw a decrease in applications of 5,240 (-9%).

   - We reported at the last plenary that, together with the British Academy, UCML has purchased a **UCAS dataset showing applications to all degree courses between 2012 and 2018** which **included a language in their title** in order to have further insight into these types of course combinations. During spring, there have been regular meetings between UCML and the BA and work to interpret the data is now well under way. We are very grateful to the BA for their analysis of the data so far. The data has been cleansed to remove non relevant courses (e.g. where the course combination does not include a foreign language, e.g. American Studies) and three separate datasets have been created for later analysis – these include courses naming a) Linguistics b) Celtic Studies, Welsh, Irish, Scots Gaelic and courses in which they are the medium of instruction and c) TEFL and other EFL variants.

     Some interesting points emerge from the raw data (see summary table below) which shows applications, acceptances and numbers of courses for a range of combined degrees. Here the term 'combined' includes both joint and minor or 'with' degree combinations. Some early findings include:

     - Applications to courses combined with a language have declined overall between 2013 and 2018, from 52410 to 429259 (-18%) but **acceptances have declined from**

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[1] https://www.ucas.com/corporate/news-and-key-documents/news/rise-number-students-planning-start-university-autumn

[2] https://www.ucas.com/corporate/news-and-key-documents/news/students-grasp-best-opportunity-decades-apply-university and https://www.ucas.com/file/314866/download?token=jF_H0KfT

8375 to 7332 (-12%) whilst the numbers of courses in that time period has decreased from 2542 to 2257 (-11%).

- o Applications for French, German, Italian Studies named degrees have all decreased during the time period as have European Studies and Chinese Studies combinations but **South Asian and 'other Asian' studies have increased considerably** from a relatively low starting point (from 65 to 250 and from 130 to 600 respectively).
- o Applications to Arts and Humanities course combinations with languages have declined only slightly from 4,300 to 4050 (-5.8%) but **acceptances have increased from 585 to 630 (+7%)**. Course numbers have declined overall (from 414 to 340 or -17.8%).
- o Some non Arts combinations have seen a decline (e.g. Psychology, Economics, Law, Management Studies) but **applications to Business Studies courses with a language have increased from 1265 applications in 2012 to 1975 applications (+ 56%) in 2018** with an increase of 20 named courses (+34%) in that time frame (from 58 to 78).
- o **Applications and acceptances to combinations of science/engineering with arts/humanities/languages have increased slightly** (from 225 to 230, and from 25 to 30 respectively) during the period but from a low base. The number of courses has decreased from 23 to 17.

Table 1: Summary of data on combined degree combinations with a language for the period 2012 to 2018

	Courses	Applications	Acceptances
2012	2525	52410	8375
2013	2465	49455	8275
2014	2699	49650	8260
2015	2515	51425	8715
2016	2453	49585	8190
2017	2317	46375	7865
2018	2222	42925	7340

Language Trends England 2020

- The annual Language Trends England survey for 2020 was carried out from early March to mid-April 2020 and unfortunately had a lower response rate due to the impact of COVID 19. The report (now in its 19th year) from the British Council[3] is designed to gather information about language teaching and learning in primary and secondary schools in England. Headline findings include: **inconsistent transition from primary to secondary school; the much healthier uptake for languages at GCSE in all-boys and all-girls schools, compared to mixed-schools in the state sector; an ongoing overall decline in pupil uptake of languages at A level in both independent and state sectors whilst there have been small increases for French and Spanish at GCSE; the shrinkage in the teaching of German in Language Trends 2019 is not replicated in 2020.** A final point to be mentioned, from the 271 responding schools, is that **only 46.5% of year 10 students were taking at least one language subject compared to 50% in 2018** indicating that the eBacc still does not have the hoped-for impact on uptake.

HEPI report on Languages

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[3] https://www.britishcouncil.org/research-policy-insight/research-reports/language-trends-2020

- For those that missed the Higher Education Policy Institute report[4], *A Languages Crisis?* (HEPI Report 123), it makes interesting reading and contains useful comparative data. Written by a third year Classics undergraduate, the headline feature reports that **'only 32 per cent of 15-to-30 year olds from the UK can read and write in two or more languages (including their first language). This is less than half the level in the second-placed EU country** (71 per cent in Hungary), and far behind France (79 per cent), Germany (91 per cent) and Denmark (99 per cent)' The report makes a number of recommendations for action.

Towards a national languages strategy: education and skills
- This much needed document[5] published this week with contributions from the *British Academy, the Arts and Humanities Research Council, the Association of School and College Leaders, the British Council and Universities UK* sets out proposals for short, medium and long term action in which success will reverse 'the persistent decline in take up of languages throughout the education pipeline' and in which 'the UK could become a linguistic powerhouse: more prosperous, productive, influential, innovative, knowledgeable, culturally richer, more socially cohesive and healthier'.

2. Routes into Languages (RiL)

Transfer of IPR from the Office for Students (OfS), formerly HEFCE is nearly complete and in my role as Vice-Chair Language and Intercultural Education, I recently chaired the new Routes UCML sub-committee which will act as a Steering Group for Routes branded activities. The group will meet quarterly with each former RiL consortium lead university and the RiL Translation and Interpreting Networks invited to send a representative to meetings. The terms of reference for the sub-committee are to:

1. *Act as a forum to exchange ideas, share best practice and identify priorities and new directions which will continue the RiL principles of promoting language take-up;*
2. *Coordinate and promote RiL branded activities taking place in England and Wales;*
3. *Monitor and report UK-wide RiL activities to the UCML Executive Committee.*

A number of Routes universities are still running well attended events (even during the present COVID 19 lockdown) which is testament to the commitment to the Routes ethos. The Routes web site is still generating a substantial amount of traffic especially to events pages. The Routes web presence however, is the first task for the group to address since much of the current site is out of date although there are likely to be many Routes generated resources which are still of value.

3. Gender Action

I am the UCML representative to this group. The project aims to challenge gender stereotypes in nurseries, schools and colleges and has been hosted by the Institute of Physics until now although funding is coming to an end in autumn and a new sponsor is being sought. The project has run a London pilot for a 3 level recognition scheme around gender equality which was initially launched with funding from the Mayor of London although activity has ceased in recent months due to the pandemic. It is still hoped that there might be future funding from the Greater London Authority (GLA) or other sources in order to maintain and expand the project. The resources (challenging gender stereotyping toolkit, fliers, posters, reports, videos, case studies etc) which have been created for schools are to be found at https://www.genderaction.co.uk/gender-action-resources.

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[4] https://www.hepi.ac.uk/2020/01/09/action-needed-to-avert-the-growing-crisis-in-language-learning/
[5] https://www.thebritishacademy.ac.uk/documents/2597/Towards-a-national-languages-strategy-July-2020.pdf

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