Item 3.c: Vice-Chair Research

**REF 2022:** The REF reports were released on May 12th. We published a digest of the results on our website, taking a sector-wide perspective (https://university-council-modern-languages.org/2022/05/12/publication-of-ref-2021-results/, also included below). We look forward to hearing more about REF and how we move forward in our plenary session with the REF sub-panel chairs and deputy chairs and a range of other stakeholders.

**PG bursary:** The PG bursary has now been launched. There will be two cycles each year. The first deadline is in October 2022. Applicants are encouraged to work with a mentor via the ECA mentoring programme when preparing an application and/or undertaking the project. https://university-council-modern-languages.org/ucml-pg-bursary/.

The research pages on our website have been rejigged to include a tab on UCML research funding (Small Grants and PG Bursary). https://university-council-modern-languages.org/ucml-research-funding-2/

The small grants committee met and awarded funding for the second and third cycles of the year. Again, the quality of applications is excellent.

I attended the IMLR Advisory Board meeting on July 1st. The IMLR have appointed 4 Fellows to contribute to the IMLR’s scoping mission of activities embedding inclusion, participation and engagement in the humanities. The IMLR plans to reconfigure its book series so that it is commensurate with what the IMLR does as an institution and is distinct from the work of other publishers. The IMLR stresses that this is no comment on the quality of the current books in the series, which is very high, but rather a move to give the series a more defined scope to support the IMLR’s strategic priorities.

**AHRC Fellows:** in February EC and I attended a meeting with the AHRC Fellows Nicola McLellan (NM), Michelle Macleod (MM), and Emmanuelle Labeau (EL) to feed into their thinking as they responded to the brief to examine the threats, risks, and emerging opportunities for AHRC funding. The Fellows gave a further update on their work on July 5th. Their report has now been submitted to the AHRC and although they were not able to share their recommendations, they outlined the tri-partite structure of their investigation: What next for languages research in the UK? (led by NM); The research landscape of indigenous languages in the UK (led by MM); Birmingham research for upholding multilingualism (BRUM) (led by EL). Their research draws on questionnaires and a wide range of stakeholder interviews. Some elements that might be particularly relevant for UCML include the finding that only 53% of PhD students in UK HEIs did their UG study in the UK, suggesting the pipeline is primarily international. 72% of staff submitted to UoA 26 in REF were from Russell Group institutions, with possible implications for where research is carried out. In terms of expertise, 75% of respondents had expertise in European languages. 65% of researchers described
their interdisciplinary experience as working as a lone researcher, drawing on more than one discipline (although 76% have worked with a partner inside or outside the UK). The most requested areas for skills development were digital analysis and the representation and visualization of data. There was strong support for all the current forms of funding provided by the AHRC aside from follow-on funding for impact (viewed as two bites of the cherry). There was strong support for the introduction of new funding for lower ceiling grants for pump-priming (up to £50k) or mid-range (less than £1 million), for postdoctoral fellowships and for the continuation of responsive mode funding. Looking at indigenous languages, the future research needs identified by stakeholders included primary and secondary education (retention, transition, attrition); adult education (in an interdisciplinary approach with psychology, looking at barriers to language use); theory of language planning as an academic discipline (to measure the success or otherwise of policies); language markets. There was a cost barrier for smaller institutions of working with HEIs. Looking at Birmingham as a case study for multilingualism, stakeholders wanted research on: pupil motivation (secondary schools); the effectiveness of teaching approaches (primaries); the impact of the pandemic, the financial crisis and the Clean Air Zone (adult education); the sustainability of languages; advocacy for languages; widening participation in and of languages (in terms of the languages with which we engage).

UCML were thanked for their support for the re-launch of LSP (Languages Society Policy) journal at the relaunch event on July 5th. LSP is a journal connecting research in linguistics and languages, cultures and societies with policy and the public (www.lspjournal.com ). It welcomes 3 types of submissions: policy papers, opinion articles, and dialogues.

In February I also attended a focus group looking at the future of AHRC DTP funding organised by CRAC. A key point to emerge was the need to disseminate AHRC support (e.g. training) more widely to avoid a two-tier system where funded students have access to many more resources as well as funding.

REF digest

Ambitious, excellent, transformational: Modern Languages Research in the REF Overview reports

UCML welcomes the REF overview reports (www.ref.ac.uk) which contextualise the REF results released on May 12th 2022. The reports reflect on the results of the Main Panels and of the sub-panels within them. Modern Languages research was submitted in particular to Main Panel D in sub-panel 25 (Area Studies), sub-panel 26 (Modern Languages and Linguistics) and also to sub-panel 27 (English Language and Literature) and to Main Panel C in sub-panel 23 (Education).

The overview reports reflect the ‘strength and vibrancy’ of research in Modern Languages, and noted the ‘significant, often transformational contributions that units of all types and sizes are making to knowledge, culture, well-being, and economic prosperity locally, regionally, nationally, and internationally through their research and its impacts.’ Although the results of REF 2014 and REF 2021 are not directly comparable due to changes in submission rules, REF 2021 is a testament to

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1 Main Panel D Overview Report, p. 67.
the health of the discipline in terms of increased levels of external research funding, rising postgraduate recruitment (with a much higher growth in sub-panel 26 than other disciplines in Main Panel D), increased proportions of world-leading and internationally excellent outputs, and ‘outstanding’ impact case studies.\(^2\)

UCML is pleased to see that the report notes world-leading work across different kinds of institutions, in both large and small submissions. The report appreciates the diversity of the formats in which outputs have been submitted, with monographs, edited volumes, journal articles and book chapters supplemented by a range of other formats including electronic dictionaries, scholarly editions, translation/performance, datasets, portfolios and websites. The research outputs span a wide chronological range, drawing on diverse methodological approaches, and covering an impressive spread of languages. The report highlights this multilingual activity as a ‘distinctive element of the broader national and international contribution’ of Modern Languages research and the particular academic expertise it encompasses.\(^3\) UCML is pleased to see the report highlight the way that research into languages, cultures, and societies is conducted in a global frame, with work on national contexts increasingly complemented by attention to transnational processes and entanglements.

In addition, the report praises the ‘adventurous’ and ‘ambitious’ interdisciplinarity of Modern Languages research.\(^4\) Whilst Modern Languages disciplines, due to their sustained focus on cultures and societies, are in many ways intrinsically interdisciplinary, be it thematically, methodologically, conceptually and collaboratively, the report notes important emerging areas of interdisciplinary connections. These include researchers working in fusion with disciplines across education, psychology, medicine and clinical sciences, pure and applied sciences, social sciences, and the humanities.

The REF report shows that Modern Languages can be proud of the reach and significance of its research impact. Modern Languages research demonstrates local, regional, national, and international reach with a wide range of beneficiaries, with evidence of excellence at every level and high quality outcomes from every size of unit. Modern Languages research has shown a diverse range of benefits to the economy, society, culture, public policy and public services, addressing a remarkable variety of contemporary social challenges and areas of urgent public concern. The discipline has revealed and addressed problems at multiple levels across myriad societies and communities in the UK and internationally. It has led to improved provision or access to services, whilst public and political debate, as well as policy decisions or changes to legislation, have been shaped by Modern Languages research. The report notes the way Modern Languages research is instrumental in enhancing cultural heritage preservation and interpretation and has increased cultural participation for marginalised and under-engaged communities.

UCML welcomes the finding that excellent research environments are evident in submissions from units of a range of shapes and sizes. UCML is pleased to see the report note strong support systems in place for ECRs and staff, which strongly resonate with the work our ECA Special Interest Group is undertaking across the sector. The emphasis on the importance of mentoring and support for all stages of the academic lifecycle is a welcome message.

\(^2\) Main Panel D Overview Report, p. 67.
\(^3\) Main Panel D Overview Report, p. 69.
\(^4\) Main Panel D Overview Report, p. 71.
Furthermore, the report also highlights the important role played by Modern Languages researchers in fostering the health of the discipline though participation in subject associations, learned societies, Research Councils and funding bodies. Given the diversity of languages represented, this work takes on a crucial role and in the challenging climate in which Modern Languages operates, UCML welcomes this recognition of the importance of collaborative working across institutions.

Moving forward, the Overview Report invites us to reflect on a number of areas and action points. The report stresses the increased attention to, and marked improvement in, ED+I matters, especially in terms of gender, and it suggests that HEIs can further this work by paying greater attention to the full range of protected characteristics, and to the intersectionality between them. The report suggests that particular attention needs to be paid to Open Access and research integrity in some submissions. It also notes that the structure of the REF framework invites reflection, as it underlines the burden on smaller units to produce two Impact Case Studies for all submissions up to 19.99 FTEs.

In terms of recognition of our discipline, the report highlights that subjects in the Arts and Humanities are rarely mentioned in institutional REF5a (environment indicator) documents. Recognising the key role played by Modern Languages and the Arts and Humanities more broadly is part of an ongoing process of reflection and advocacy on how we build our profile within institutions and foreground the excellent work that this report outlines.

Liz Wren-Owens, 12/06/22