Report from the Early Career Academics Representative - Ashley Harris

1. Code of Practice

Along with the SIG and Project Coordinator Liam Lewis, we are planning ways of contacting languages schools and departments in HE and tracking responses to the ECA Code of Practice. The ECA SIG is open to recommendations for the management of this and for incentivising sign-up.

For information, the Code of Best Practice proposes best practice standards centring around integrity and equality in all respects, and exists to promote the best interests of academics, in particular Early Career Academics (ECAs). The Code can be viewed here: https://university-council-modern-languages.org/early-career-academics/code-of-best-practice/.

2. ECA Special Interest Group chairs

Hilary Potter will be stepping down as ECA SIG co-chair in August 2023 and will be replaced by Olivia Glaze (Portuguese Studies). Ashley Harris remains a co-chair but will seek replacement in Autumn 2023 to focus on the role of ECA Representative to the Exec.

3. Events for 2023

1. The ECA SIG was successful in securing UCML Small Grant funding to organise an in-person meeting after three years of primarily online-only contact.

2. The first of a series of workshops was on ‘Job applications and career pathways’ on 12 June 2023. The event included ‘Ten tips for approaching an academic job’, and a live session between a Cambridge Careers Advisor and one of the ECA SIG members to adapt her CV for a non-academic employer. This event welcomed over one hundred participants and was praised for its new approaches to the well-trodden theme. The recording is being prepared for distribution to ECAs.

3. The ECA SIG continues to host its coffee mornings/evening drinks this term. The SIG will also organise Virtual Writing sessions due to their previous popularity.

4. Call for Mentors for ECAs

The UCML ECA SIG runs a valued mentoring scheme for early career academics, which pairs them with more established academics: https://university-council-modern-languages.org/early-career-academics/eca-support-network/eca-support-network-year-long-mentoring-scheme/.
Mid-year feedback from mentees was overwhelmingly positive. There has been a good response to recent call for mentors, particularly in Italian and Hispanic studies, which have been underrepresented among mentors. We are always grateful for new mentors.

5. REF2028 implications for ECAs

The perception is that there are positive gains in some respects. For example, research not being part of your contract does not automatically exclude you from inclusion in REF submission; it is noted, however, that this may lead to exploitation. Creating an impact and engagement project is less familiar to ECAs and therefore they are less likely to participate in this increasingly significant element of REF.

ECAs need a specific session on how REF2028 changes will impact them. The SIG will endeavour to organise this with an appropriate guest speaker.

6. General comments on the state of the field

1. Posts: There is a lack of long-term or full-year posts across the disciplines. Posts are often below 1.0 FTE and teaching only.

There is a sense of confusion and uncertainty as to what it takes to secure a full time, permanent job. Shortlisting processes seem opaque. There is the perception that permanent posts increasingly seek more publications (at least one monograph), and impact and funding experience.

2. Funding: The ECR funding space is increasingly competitive.

3. Responses: The SIG is seeking new approaches and focuses to deal with these issues. Some suggested proposals that the SIG will meet to discuss and possibly implement include:

   - Outreach to schools in the hopes of helping numbers.
   - An advice panel from colleagues who have sat on recent selection committees for permanent jobs.
   - Live lists of resources / job websites.
   - Contact / sessions with those who moved beyond academia.
   - A session on grant / funding available to ECAs in languages.
   - A session on how REF2028 changes will impact ECAs.

If you would like to get in touch, please email me at ascott23@qub.ac.uk

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