

Report on Identity and Proposal for Name Change

University Council of Modern Languages (UCML), June 2023

Context

Following the recent name change of the Institute of Languages, Cultures and Societies (ILCS, formerly IMLR) at the School of Advanced Study, University of London (SAS), and the recently revised [Subject Benchmarking Statement for Languages, Cultures, and Societies](#), we are writing with a proposal to change the name of the University Council of Modern Languages (UCML) which we suggest better reflects the current state of the field and our priorities as an organisation.

The ILCS recently changed its name following consultation with the subject associations that represent Modern Languages, Area Studies, and Linguistics. Their justification is available to read in the '[Our Vision](#)' section of their website. While the ILCS and the UCML differ in their missions and scope, the time seemed right for a re-evaluation of our own brand identity.

The UCML Chair and former Representative for Early Career Academics embarked on a consultation on UCML's identity, aiming to assess the scope of the work currently being undertaken by the Council, and to explore possible name changes and their effects.

Consultation Process

In December 2022, we canvassed opinion on a possible name change from a group of members of the UCML Executive Committee, from representational bodies including the British Academy, the ILCS, the Subject Benchmark Statement panel, and from scholars with expertise in our wider disciplinary identity. We collated and anonymised these opinions in a [document](#) on our Sharepoint. We then circulated this document to a group of 5 stakeholders, whose responses to our survey represented different and competing opinions on a possible name change.

In May 2023, we held detailed discussions with these 5 stakeholders, focussing on UCML's brand identity, our mission and constituency, and future directions for the discipline, as well as observations raised by a number of colleagues concerning definitions of the field as they relate to educational policy and languages in schools. We added these further observations into the shared document following these discussions.

Proposal for Name Change

The central concern for the majority of respondents to our consultation was the term 'Modern' in 'University Council of Modern Languages'. This term raises a number of problems for those surveyed, primary among these the reinforcing of a disciplinary focus on a select group of European languages, potentially sidelining areas such as ancient, medieval, indigenous, heritage, and community languages, and not communicating the broad spectrum of disciplinary activity currently undertaken in the field. It was also noted that the term has benefits, including signalling the sector's focus on the active competence of languages currently in use, and offering a visible disciplinary focus. While 'Modern' was originally used as a term to designate this active production of language, and to distinguish this disciplinary field from Classics, we feel overall that the more recent slippage of the term and its association with European languages to the exclusion of others was significant enough that the term could no longer be used without the negative associations being made.

For detailed discussion of the implications of a name change for UCML, see the shared document above.

Another significant concern raised by our consultation was that of UCML's brand identity and the possible harm to this of a name change. We have decided through this consultation that a complete overhaul of UCML's identity is not required at this stage, but that finding an alternative to 'Modern' could present benefits that outweigh the costs, especially by defining our remit as more inclusive to colleagues in areas that have traditionally or historically been outside the remit of 'Modern'. Our proposal is to change our organisation's name to:

University Council for Languages (UCfL)

We see a number of benefits in adopting this change. The name and acronym maintains our overall identity through the terms 'University' and 'Council' and the single letter-change in the acronym. This name confirms our identity as responsive to changes in the field and widens our remit to include any Languages-related education, research, and advocacy areas.

Next steps

In June 2023, the UCML Steering Group confirmed that this name change would be put to the General Council at the Summer Plenary AGM on 14 July 2023.