UCFL Business Meeting

Friday, 12th Jan, 2024

Chair’s Report

A very warm welcome to new members joining us; grateful thanks and farewell to those leaving (see also report of Honorary Secretary). Since the last plenary we have welcomed Ashley Harris (ECA), Christine Schallmoser (co-chair of the AULC and UCML SIG); Natalie Edwards (co-Chair of the Heads SIG); Alvise Sforza Tarabochia (Italian Studies), Kathryn Jones (Celtic Studies), Merryn Davies-Deacon (Northern Ireland) and Claire Reid (Year Abroad SIG).

On the Steering Group we have welcomed a new Treasurer (back): Olga Gómez-Cash, and Sandra Salin to the new role of Membership Secretary; we are also very pleased that Wendy Ayres-Bennett has joined us in a new role as Honorary Policy Advisor. Our new VC Languages and Intercultural Education will be our very own Marcela Cazzoli! Congratulations to Marcela, and we will therefore need to look for another Honorary Secretary in due course.

A huge thanks to the excellent Vicky Wright who leaves us as VC Languages and Intercultural Education but who will remain Sub-Committee Chair of Routes into Languages in a new affiliated role.

We are hugely grateful to all those leaving roles, and on behalf of the Steering Group, we want to say particular thanks to our friend and colleague, Vicky, who has been so instrumental in advancing so many agendas on behalf of UCFL over a long period of time. We are delighted that we won’t be wholly losing her expertise.

Meetings and invitations to speak in second half of 2023/24:

- The Strategic Committee for Languages in Higher Education (SCLHE - jointly chaired by UCFL and BA) – 23rd June and 6th November
  
  UCFL is preparing a briefing, in collaboration with the British Academy, for the APPG ML on HEI languages degree programme closures and on how to support programmes in this position.

- Society for French Studies Annual Conference, Newcastle University - 26-28th June
  Ashley Harris spoke on behalf of the ECA network at a round table on ‘French Studies and the Precarious Humanities’ at which I was respondent. The round table was chaired and organised by James Illingworth.

  Charles Burdett, Liam Lewis, Becky Muradás-Taylor and Liz Wren-Owens spoke on behalf of ILCS and UCFL at this seminar discussing the findings of the AHRC Language Fellows.
• ILCS Languages Policy workshop: Building Collaboration between Academics and Policymakers – 18th October. Speakers included members of the Cross-Government Languages Group (xGLG) and academics from a range of UK institutions. Organised by Wendy-Ayres Bennett and Charles Burdett as part of the ‘Thinking Strategically’ seminar series.

• The Languages Gateway Launch – 18th October, British Academy, London, and various online launches for nations through November.

• AMLUK Conference: Impact and Future Research Directions, ILCS - 3rd November. Liz Wren-Owens attended on behalf of UCFL.

• Special Forum on ‘Making the Case for German’ – 14th November, German House. I will represent UCFL at this event organised by the German Embassy together with the British Council. The Forum will be addressed by The Rt Hon Nick Gibb MP, Minister of State for Schools.

• The APPG ML will host the parliamentary launch of the Languages Gateway in the House of Lords – 29th January 2024. Chair of UCFL and Policy Advisor to speak about significance of gateway to languages and cultures in HE.

Consultation, campaign and policy paper on Home and Community Languages with BA/LAGB

Working with Charles Forsdick (now Languages Fellow at the British Academy), Yuni Kim from LAGB, Vicky, and Sky to gather data, anecdotes for a policy paper on acceptance of home/community languages. This work was presented at the Strategic Committee on Languages in Higher Education in November 2022. Charles and the BA are working on a paper to be released shortly.

Campaign for Translation Studies

Report produced on the health of the field with Callum Walker (APTIS), Begoña Rodríguez de Céspedes, and Fransiska Louwagie. We aim to launch a package of action around recruitment and closures in Translation Studies. There was a panel arising from this work this afternoon at the Summer Plenary. Begoña and I were invited to report on this panel and UCFL’s activity more generally at the APPG ML meeting at the House of Lords on Monday 17th July.

BA Languages Gateway

Ongoing consultation with UCFL on the new Languages Gateway, one of the outcomes of the BA paper, Towards a National Languages Strategy (TNLS). Liaison with Philip Harding-Esch, APPG ML. A working site is up and running and was recently launched publicly. Feedback is encouraged. Mark Critchley is Chair of the Editorial Board (on which I also sit), and we welcome all feedback. There is also a linked twitter/X account @LangsGateway

Health of the Disciplinary field:

Last year we wrote to Birkbeck, UEA, Kent, DMU, and lately Aberdeen, and Oxford Brookes (where language programmes remain unchallenged in spite of widespread VS and the closure of Maths and Music) on behalf of UCFL to offer support to the colleagues there, and to protest the proposed redundancies. We remain in contact with Birkbeck, UEA, DMU, and Kent colleagues to support through any further upheaval. Birkbeck and Kent have recently announced that they will not be moving to compulsory redundancies, however this is not the case for UEA which does still face compulsory redundancies. Recent concerning developments at Coventry, De Montfort, and Nottingham Trent are
also on our radar, and we are in touch with colleagues at these institutions to monitor the situations and offer support as needed.

**Aberdeen** has been a sudden, shocking, and deeply concerning development that we were first made aware of in November. Staff were also informed with very little in the way of preparation. UCFL has offered support and assistance to the consultation process, and we have received a reply from **Prof Karl Leydecker**, Senior Vice Principal at Aberdeen, who is leading the consultation process for the School of Language, Literature, Music and Visual Culture (LLMVC). He has since been in touch to ask for recommendations around programme restructure and design, and I have also talked to staff members, and to the Head of School, Chris Collins. We will keep a watching brief. There was a crisis meeting of the **UCFL Heads SIG** to discuss this and other planned restructures.

- As mentioned earlier, in collaboration with the British Academy and other bodies, we have been asked to prepare a briefing for the APPG ML on HEI languages degree programme closures and how to tackle these. APPG has requested data on contraction (including on the numbers of HEIs, and for this to be set in context of uptake at school level, of cold spots, and of different kinds of institutions (cf. B. Muradas-Taylor research on low entry tariffs). We will report back on this and share the eventual paper. We also welcome all input from members to feed in.

**SIGs:**

We now have 7 Special Interest Groups within the UCFL family. Our recently added SIGs were approved at the July Plenary meeting.

**ECA** - ECA code of practice launch – this was launched in 2021 with a short promotional video, we would urge all members to ask their Schools and Departments to engage with it: [https://university-council-modern-languages.org/early-career-academics/code-of-best-practice/](https://university-council-modern-languages.org/early-career-academics/code-of-best-practice/)

**Heads SIG** – Natalie Edwards (Bristol) is Co-chair with David Cowling (Durham). The SIG now has administrative support from the ILCS and they held a successful first meeting in December – this was, unfortunately, partly a crisis meeting directly tackling recent news of restructures and closures.

**YA SIG** – Huge thanks to both Jonathan and James who have now stepped down for their tireless work over the pandemic and aftermath, and to Claire Reid (Portsmouth) who has been appointed as Chair.

**Lesser taught languages SIG (joint AULC/UCFL)** – Prof Wen-Chin Ouyang (SOAS) is Co-Chair for UCFL with colleagues from the AULC (Justyna Drobnik-Rogers and Sandra Torres).

**Widening Participation Languages network** – Chaired by Becky Muradas-Taylor. UCFL have been liaising with this SIG due to recent developments with Depts at risk.

**AMLUK** – regular contact with Charles Burdett, and UCFL steering group attendance at meetings.

**New UCFL-AULC SIG** – joint SIG across AULC and UCFL which was launched at the AULC conference in Edinburgh in 2023. The vision is for this SIG to enhance collaboration between ILWPs and degree programmes and to strengthen the status of language teaching in UK Higher Education overall. Given the ‘divide and conquer’ approach many University managements seem to be adopting to the provision of languages and cultures at HE level (usually reducing or eliminating degree offerings and retaining some level of language acquisition through credit-bearing modules/programmes/IWLPs), it is imperative for this SIG to draw up advice and strategy to benefit the sector. This is currently underway and we will update soon.

A jiscmail list has already been established. SIG Co-Chairs are Christine Schallmoser, Senior Lecturer in German Language Education and Language Director, King’s College London and Marina Rabadán,
Academic Director of Open Languages (IWLP), University of Liverpool. AULC-UCML Special Interest Group – University Council of Modern Languages (university-council-modern-languages.org)

Routes into Languages

Vicky and Sky continue to hold regular meetings. UCFL will partner with other organisations through Routes to collaborate with the newly established DfE-funded National Consortium for Language Education (NCLE), UCL. Vicky and I are in regular contact with Bernardette Holmes, Director of the NCLE, and a formal arrangement between NCLE and Routes is in the process of being agreed.

AULC/UCFL report

We are aiming to follow through with the results of this report. Now that we have the Heads and joint AULC-UCFL SIGs, communication may be easier with individual Universities to gather information for the survey. At last report we had 21 responses from 54 possible respondents. Marcela will now take this forward as new VC.

Consultation on possible change of name for UCFL:

Liam Lewis (Project Coordinator) and I launched a consultation process in 2022. We took a proposal to the membership at the Summer AGM, and the decision was taken over a new name. We are therefore now referred to as The University Council For Languages (UCFL) – with a capital ‘F’ to indicate advocacy. Main drivers behind the consultation were shifts in the disciplinary field and perceptions of our area, decolonial turn, recent ILCS name change, SBS statement for our disciplinary fields.

Comms (on behalf of VC Comms):

(Social) media:
- Twitter and Facebook activity was maintained.
- Bluesky account started, alongside the ILCS one, but most followers and activity still on X (Twitter)
- Threads and Instagram accounts have been created but have limited potential due to image-based nature.
- Move to incorporate the jiscmail list more systematically.
- We had a very high number of impressions on Twitter in November (62k) and December (125k), as opposed to an average of 20-25k for a normal month, which may be largely due to the attention for the situation at Aberdeen. This has generated widespread comms regarding languages in a lot of social domains and newspapers. Beyond that we have just advertised the usual (new roles, events).

Translation Studies: report/policy paper based on plenary under review at LSP.

EC. 10/01/2024