UCFL Executive Committee meeting, Friday 24 May 2024

Report on Slavonic and East European Studies

CONCERNS

- UG numbers remain a matter of concern, with some institutions reporting a drop, while numbers remain stable at others. The forecasts for funding in UK universities generally mean that numbers on courses may well come under scrutiny in the coming years.
- Institutional restrictions on UG modules (minimum number of students allowed, allowing modules to be offered to one year group only and/or to students of one department etc.) can make the difference between an attractive and intellectually coherent offer and an uncompetitive one. This was highlighted in the responses I received to a request for information on the Russian optional module offer at seven universities comparable to Sheffield. My thanks to all colleagues who so willingly responded with so much helpful information: this report meant that I could make the case for retaining a full optional module offer for 2024-5 in Sheffield. Countering this trend may mean making it clear what the effect of such institution-wide policies can be to higher-level administration. Some thought should be given to how the optional module offer might help us recruit students to language programmes; and also how less commonly taught languages can be kept visible.
- The difficulty of new A-level Russian exam (board not specified) was commented on: only (near-)native speakers achieve grades above A, while candidates of varying competencies are reported as achieving A grades. I attended the Russian Teachers' Group annual meeting in March: all are aware of this problem. I will pass on any news of exam boards' responses.

RESEARCH

Birmingham

- Natasha Rulyova and Isobel Palmer have secured BRIDGE Seed Funding (internal) for a collaborative project with colleagues in the Slavic dept at University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign. The aim is to build interdisciplinary collaboration on research at UoB and UIUC related to Russophone literary diversity and peripheries, with diversity being understood along geographic, ethnic, racial, cultural, linguistic, and gender axes. As part of this project, we are holding a two-day symposium entitled *Russophone Literary Diversity* at UoB on **7-8 September 2024** and an early career scholars' workshop at Illinois in summer 2025 related to the Summer Research Laboratory hosted by the REEEC and the University Library. Colleagues are warmly invited to apply to take part in our Symposium (for further info, see https://www.birmingham.ac.uk/news/2024/symposium-on-russophone-literary-diversity-call-for-papers)
- Natasha Rulyova has been holding interviews with Russophone authors, which can be accessed online: Guzel Yakhina https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FB5ud8Ngmos,
  Alisa Ganieva https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OYMcWOG2NZY, and
  Hamid Ismailov https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YXZSGoEx03U.

Queen Mary

- the creation in September 2023 of a new research centre, 'The Centre for Eurasian, Russian and East European Studies', which has been a success in running a number of well-attended events in the field and engaged with the challenges of the need to reconceptualise
- Jeremy Hicks was successful in a bid for a Leverhulme Research Fellowship (1 year from January 2025) on 'Humanitarian Film and Communist Agitation: Russian and International Films of The Volga Famine 1921- 1923'

- Our AHRC-funded CDA student, Daria Lis, exploring postcolonial discourse in East European studies by focusing on the British Library's unique Belarusian collection began her programme in September 2023
- as Russian subject editor of *Forum for Modern Language Studies*, Jeremy Hicks commissioned a special roundtable publication in the 'Talking Points' series, entitled 'Russian and Slavonic Studies at the Crossroads: The Implications of the War in Ukraine.' This is due out imminently, and there will be an event at the Institute for Advanced Study on 31 May to explore these themes and mark the occasion of the publication: https://www.sas.ac.uk/events/what-does-war-ukraine-mean-us

Warwick

- Conference paper: Dr Maria Belova, 19/04/2023, 'On the history of Matilde Serao's translations into Russian', International conference *New Studies on Italian Language and Literature*, Russian State University for the Humanities (Moscow)
- Article: Maria Belova, On the history of Matilde Serao's translations into Russian [«К истории переводов Матильды Серао на русский язык» в сборнике «Новые исследования в области итальянского языка и литературы»], ред. Р.А. Говорухо, РГГУ: Москва, 2023

TEACHING

Birmingham

- Masha Wald has led for Russian on the new Digital First offering that has been put together by UoB Languages for All (open to students across the university). Her summary: "As part of the Languages for All program, I've been involved in the development and launch of two new Digital First Russian modules this year, alongside eight other language offerings. What sets these DF modules apart is their innovative blend of flexible remote digital learning, featuring engaging gamified online activities, and interactive, oral communication-focused in-class sessions. Students have the opportunity to engage with the digital materials at their convenience before attending the in-class sessions. The material learned online serves as the foundation for in-class conversations, starting from the very first session. DF Russian 1 and DF Russian 2 are available to all students and staff at UoB, allowing participants to achieve A1.1 and A1.2 proficiency levels, respectively. Here is the link to the DF framework." Uptake has been good so far and we are hoping to adopt some of the activities for our Core Russian modules to help mitigate effects of reduced class time.

Durham

- Despite declining numbers of students in the recent couple of years we will be adding an additional module in linguistics to our second-year provisions next year.
- We were able to strengthen our provisions for ab initio second-year students starting from the next year.
- There were some changes that affected other European languages at Durham in the drive for efficiency, but I have been able to defend our year abroad projects which will remain to be offered, and for some more challenging languages we were also able to keep both 20- and 40-credit dissertations.
- The number of post A-level students who applied and were given offers at Durham looks particularly healthy, but we will need to wait and see how many students will accept our offers.

Queen Mary

- We have reevaluated and adjusted our teaching to reflect the need to reflect on Russia's colonial dimension and expanded its scope to encompass russophone and post-Soviet spaces, with, for instance, a new module on Contemporary Post-Soviet Documentary Film

STUDENT SOCIETIES

Durham

- The new undergraduate Slavonic organisation is quite active. They organised a couple of career talks for students studying Russian and other Slavonic languages in the UK, which were very successful.

Warwick

- Russian Speaking Club with native speakers on Warwick campus. Through completion of creative speaking tasks and collaborative projects as well as an individual reflective report, they develop their linguistic proficiency, intercultural understanding and employability skills. One of the Russian speaking students who act as a leader for this project was originally from Uzbekistan.

NEW POSTS

Durham

- We will have a new TF, but we need to wait until the announcement of the outcome of Early Career Leverhulme Fellowships before we can confirm who our new TF will be. We might be able to have two new colleagues—one TF and one early career researcher.

Queen Mary

- appointment from January 2023 of Maria Chehonadskih, Lecturer in Russian

Sheffield

- Appointment of Mariam McMahon, Teaching Assistant in Russian, September 2023

GUEST LECTURES

Warwick

- Anton Gumenskiy, 'The Masculine and the Feminine in Russian Culture', 7 March 2024
- Zoya Kouzmina, 'Russian Economy: A Strategic View', 14 March 2024

PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

Birmingham

- Natasha Rulyova and Isobel Palmer are organising an upcoming event at Pushkin House, which will be a panel conversation with the writers Anna Berseneva, Vladimir Sotnikov and Katerina Gordeeva on 25 June, 6:30pm.
- Olga Kenton has been giving introduction to Russian talks at schools, including most recently Oxford High.
- Tanya Lipatova ran a masterclass for school children from Birmingham, organised as part of outreach on campus.

Warwick:

- Helping Ukrainian refugees to overcome language barriers. Read more here: https://warwicklanguages.wordpress.com/2024/05/09/helping-ukrainian-refugees-to-overcome-language-barriers/
- One of our tutors conducted A-level exams and GCSE exams helping students from the Ukraine living with host families in Worcester: 5 students, all Ukrainian: 2 A-level and 3 GCSE.
- Interviews for three articles for the newspaper *Kommersant* about access to higher education for Russian-speaking relocated citizens:
    - https://www.kommersant.uk/articles/vtoroe-vysshee-po-britanski-statya-pervaya-chto-eto-takoe-komu-eto-nuzhno-i-kak-postupt

- https://www.kommersant.uk/articles/vtoroe-vysshee-po-britanski-statya-vtoraya-snova-stat-studentom
- https://www.kommersant.uk/articles/vtoroe-vysshee-po-britanski-statya-tretya-skolko-eto-stoit-i-kak-sekonomit-na-universitetskom-obuchenii

COLLABORATIONS

Warwick:

- We piloted this year a Virtual Exchange with the American University of Central Asia (AUCA) in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan. We have had very positive feedback from students. Students of Russian across all years of studies participated in this project and were paired to students from AUCA. They met regularly in Term 1 and presented a collaborative project in Term 2. Here you can see an example of such a project (two students beginners from Warwick with a students from Bishkek): https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M5W9HoWTE-s&t=6s
- We are finalising (this week there will be the last committee to approve) two places for our students for a Year Abroad at Almaty in Kazakhstan at Temirbek Zhurgenov Kazakh National Academy of Art.
- We also offer two places for our students for their year abroad at the University of Tartu.

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