UCFL Summer Plenary 2024

5th July 2024

Report from the Early Career Academics Representative – Ashley Harris

1. ECA Code of Best Practice

What is it? 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) and those on temporary contracts. The Code can be viewed here: https://universitycouncil-modern-languages.org/early-career-academics/code-of-best-practice/

Endorsements This Code has now been endorsed by the following major Subject Associations:

1. Association of British and Irish Lusitanists (ABIL)
2. The Association of Hispanists of Great Britain & Ireland (Hispanists)
3. Association for Low Countries Studies (ALCS)
4. Association for the teaching of Spanish in HE the UK (ELEUK)
5. British Association for Applied Linguistics (BAAL)
6. British Association for Chinese Studies (BACS)
7. British Association for Japanese Studies (BAJS)
8. British Association of Lecturers in English for Academic Purposes (BALEAP)
9. British Association for Slavonic and East European Studies (BASEES)
10. The Chartered Institute of Linguists (CIOL)
11. Institute of Languages, Cultures and Societies (ILCS)
12. The Philology Society
13. Society for French Studies (SFS)
14. Society for Italian Studies (SIS)
15. Society for Latin American Studies UK (SLAS)
16. University Council of General and Applied Linguistics (UCGAL)
17. Women in German Studies (WIGS)

Next Steps: Department Opt-in

Year 1: We will ask Departments to Opt-In as a statement of intent to adhere, as far as possible, to the Code **from early August 2024**.

Opted-in Departments' names will be on the UCFL Code webpage.

Year 2 onwards: We will send an annual check-in questionnaire for language departments who have opted in to be filled in by Head of Department and countersigned by an ECA.

The check-in questionnaires will be considered through a grading system similar to the Athena Swan Charter.
The results of this grading will be shared, celebrating the success stories and encouraging reflection.

Please encourage all languages departments/schools to consider signing up when contacted shortly.

2. ECA Mentoring

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-careeracademics/eca-support-network/eca-support-network-year-long-mentoring-scheme/.

Call for Mentors has recently gone out. Colleagues interested in mentoring with approximately five or more years of experience post-viva are encouraged to send their details to the list moderator (Anja Rekeszus – ecasn.contact@gmail.com) to be added to a closed database of mentors.

Mentors can offer individual acts of support (e.g. with an application for a job or grant, discussing an article) or participate in the year-long support programme.

Call for mentees will go out in July.

3. Events in 2024

The ECA SIG continues to organise popular training, networking and support events. This term included:

1. ECA languages post-doctoral funding and fellowships opportunities session with Prof Hugh Roberts and Dr Helen Appleton.
2. Jobs beyond lecturing: careers in translation with Drs Natascha Jaeger, Hui-Hua Lu and Maria Roemer.
3. Informal virtual writing social session.

Next academic year, we are discussing the following possibilities:

1. An event on CPD opportunities for PGRs/ECAs.
2. Another session on the REF.
3. Event for internationals seeking to work in UK academia.
4. Webpage with funding options and job possibilities, language mail lists and upcoming events.
5. Session on the lesser discussed skills and experience that employers seek.

4. Concerns

ECA reps on our SIG representing their discipline report back on their area with the recurring concerns that they note. The following were raised this term:

Employment

- Decreasing number and lack of full-time, permanent positions.

- Increasing practice of advertising jobs below 1.0 FTE.
- Unpaid summers are common practice as are contracts lasting only 2-10 months.
- Increasing number of language-only posts are re-affirming that:
    i) Language Departments are service departments that can simply be replaced by language centres
    ii) Departments can be dependent on precarious tutor positions iii) No sustainable research culture is possible.

Research

- Increasing focus on research outputs / impact in interviews for teaching-only posts.
- Research treated as an essential that is done in free time / unpaid summers.

Funding and support

- Lack of funding and support for researchers who work on politically charged countries including Russia/Ukraine. Workarounds are costly in terms of time and money.
- Fellowships for ECAs are, in general, the most competitive i.e.. have the highest rate of application and the lowest rate of success.
- The need for CPD among PhD students and ECRs has become increasingly obvious: job applications at entry level are requiring increasing qualifications e.g. FHEA. CPD opportunities among universities are often patchy, inconsistent or unavailable to ECAs.

Expectations

- Expectations for early career academic positions are increasingly demanding in terms of qualifications (e.g. FHEA), experience (teaching and administration) and research (publications and grants).
- Mid-career and permanent positions are increasingly going to candidates who already had a permanent position or have, for example, had several positions following a major research grant.

General risks

- Drop in student numbers and staff cuts.

Any support or guidance for your ECA colleagues is highly valuable.

If you have any opportunity to model positive change in response to any of the above challenges, please do.

If you would like to get in touch, please email me at harrisa6@tcd.ie Ashley Harris