

UCML AGM

King's College London



Plenary 30 June 2017

Report by the Chair, Professor Michael Gratzke (15 June 2017)

For a starting point, I refer colleagues to the minutes of the previous AGM in 2016. This meeting was obviously shaped by the shock result of the EU referendum:

<http://www.ucml.ac.uk/sites/default/files/events/UCML%20Minutes%20AGM%20Plenary%20on%201%20July%202016.pdf>

As we all know, there has not been a dull moment in UK or international politics since. After a shock result in the UK general election of this summer, **Brexit negotiations** are about to start. UCML have been campaigning to maintain access to Erasmus + and ERC programmes. Given the uncertainty around the achievability of these goals, it will be wise to start a conversation with stakeholders (such as UUK, UUKI, and the UK government about alternative schemes). This links in with the changes caused by the **Higher Education Act**. Jo Johnson has retained his post, and there is little indication that the implementation of the Act is likely to be delayed. As I am writing this report, we are waiting for TEF results, REF rules will be published this summer, and the restructuring of HEFCE to Office for Students is underway. **UKRI** will be taking shape as well giving research policy in the UK a new focus. Our workshop on the future of research in Modern Languages & Cultures on the afternoon of the AGM will give colleagues ample opportunity to take stock, and to have a discussion on the projected outcomes of the OWRI projects, the direction of travel in UK research policy, and the opportunities which may be arising for our sector to engage with UKRI and other organisations and role holders over future funding priorities.

Regarding the theme of the workshop following the 2016 AGM (“Mutual support: schools and universities working together on the new A levels”), it is clear that a new consensus has been emerging across the sector that concerted and **integrated language policies** are needed. Wales and Scotland have been making some progress since in translating general goals (2+1 and 1+2 languages respectively) into political action and curricula. The issues of a lack of funds and a lack of confident MFL teachers need to be addressed. The political uncertainty in Northern Ireland (end of the power sharing executive) means that currently little progress can be expected. Additionally, the status of the Irish language in NI is a contested issue. As experts in Modern Languages & Cultures, we tend to see the commonalities between languages research

and languages acquisition across various languages. For England, there currently is no integrated language policy. There are a number of positive approaches such as the EBacc language requirement, refreshed language A levels, the tackling of 'harsh marking' practices in languages, pilot programmes for Integrated Teacher Training for Modern Languages etc. The new journal of language policy coming out of OWRI MEITS will give us an additional forum to disseminate research and to influence evidence-based policy making. The formulation, costing, budgeting and implementation of a joint-up language policy for England covering all levels of formal education and reaching out towards community and commercial providers is highly desirable and will require considerable effort and stamina.

What obviously remains a real concern is the **lack of funding across all levels of education**.

There are reports that head teachers are taking the decision to cut undersubscribed and labour-intensive subjects such as MFL alongside a host of other cost-cutting measures. With regard to MLC provision in Higher Education, the pressure has increased dramatically. In 2016 UCML intervention contributed to proposed cuts not being made in some institutions. In 2017, uncertainty over Brexit, TEF, REF, research funding, and applicant numbers are being cited by senior management in institutions as varied as the University of Manchester, University of Brighton, and Heriot-Watt University in consultations which are leading to voluntary redundancy schemes and possibly compulsory redundancy. UCML have in conjunction with other organisations in the sector been supporting colleagues locally and by creating national publicity. Although we are not a Trade Union or affiliated with any Trade Union, we are extremely concerned about the welfare of our colleagues.

We will furthermore continue to speak up for the strategic necessity to maintain MLC research and tuition at viable levels across the GB & NI. There are no strategically important individual languages; **languages as a whole are strategically important**. Instead of chasing geopolitical trends, the government and the HE sector must realise that all languages research, study and tuition is valuable, as it deepens our understanding of ourselves (internal multilingualism between established and immigrant languages) and our position in the world. Brexit with its subsequent repositioning of UK trade, economy and politics throws into sharp relief our relative lack of language skills, intercultural competence, and academic insight compared to other nations around the globe. The end of HEFCE means that the SIVS advisory group will need a new home. We will keep an eye on this issue.

This report does not need to replicate the information contained in the minutes of our Executive Committee or reports from Plenaries. You may want to refresh your memory here:

<http://www.ucml.ac.uk/sites/default/files/events/UCML%20Exec%204%20Nov%202016%20MINUTES.pdf>

<http://www.ucml.ac.uk/events/06-01-17.html>

[http://www.ucml.ac.uk/sites/default/files/events/UCML Exec 31 March 17 - draft Minutes \(of 19 April\).pdf](http://www.ucml.ac.uk/sites/default/files/events/UCML%20Exec%2031%20March%2017%20-%20draft%20Minutes%20of%2019%20April.pdf)

In terms of **developments since 31 March 2017**, an initiative to develop **AMLUK** has led to a commitment by IMLR to support the Association logistically. The meeting of **Heads of MLC** held in Durham was very productive in terms of formulating perspectives for post-Brexit MLS strategies. UUK and UUKI are keen to engage with sector organisations and policy makers over internationalisation programmes (student mobility, research) with an open mind. Should access to Erasmus + and/or ERC funding not be available anymore, we still have a need for student & staff mobility and globally networked research. I can also report that UUKI are looking into a successor to Routes into Languages which would secure Routes legacy and develop the agenda further – possibly with a mix of government funding and corporate sponsorship. The Durham meeting was inconclusive regarding possible organisational structures for the group of Heads in MLC. As Chair of UCML, I have made it clear to colleagues involved with AMLUK and Heads that UCML offers the forum for the unified voice of MLC in UK HE. We will do what we can to support any new initiative but we do not see the need for further formal organisations. In particular, our strong preference is not to deepen perceived divides between IWLPs, Language Centres, and MLC degree programmes, or between languages research and languages acquisition. However, should new organisation be formed, we will invite them to join UCML formally.

HEFCE published their guidelines to funding in April which contain information on **Study-Abroad funding**. Institutions were informed of the level of funding they could expect with an embargo until the General Election. <http://www.hefce.ac.uk/pubs/year/2017/201704/> It is expected that last year's funding arrangements will be carried forward with some small adjustments to fee levels.

You can find information on the grading of MFL here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/setting-grade-standards-in-a-level-modern-foreign-languages>

Regarding **people**, I would like to thank those colleagues who have left UCML roles in the past year, mostly notably our brilliant former Chair, those whose tenure ends with the AGM, and those who have joined us since the last AGM or will be joining from 30 June 2017. Apart from our excellent new administrative assistant, members of the Steering Group and Executive give their time and energy for free out of enthusiasm for Modern Languages & Cultures, Translation Studies, Area Studies, Linguistics and TESOL/EFL and a feeling of responsibility towards the sector and its communities. Some have their contribution recognised by their home institution, some don't. My sincere and warm thanks go to all of you.

Michael Gratzke