

Language Activism and Advocacy: Lobbying for Languages

Professor Claire Gorrara Cardiff University

Chair of the University Council of Modern Languages (2018-2021)

Presentation Outline

- Modern Languages in the UK: stories we tell ourselves and others
- What is the role of the Academy in supporting languages?
- Advocacy and activism in the university sector: the example of UCML
- Who is a language activist and what can they do?



Stories We Tell Ourselves and Others

- Modern Languages in the UK: **a story of long-term decline:** a country predisposed to 'lifelong English monolingualism'
- Yet, this is **not the full picture:** 'the UK has the potential to be a linguistic powerhouse', Neil Kenny and Harriet Barnes (2019) 'Language Learning: Turning a Crisis into an Opportunity. *British Academy Review*, Spring, p. 13)
- **Agency and belief** need to come from the language community



What is the Role of Academy in Supporting Languages?

- **Collaborating with schools:** building support networks and a robust community of practice, MFL Mentoring project in Wales and England
- **Engaging with policy makers and decision-makers:** working with UK Governments on language policy, e.g. working with Welsh Government on the Draft Curriculum for Wales 2022
- **Mobilising other organisations who share the languages mission:** British Council, British Academy, Chartered Institute of Linguists
- **Generating projects with other university departments:** *collaboration not competition*: for example, 'Rethinking the Languages Pipeline in a Age of Brexit', 27 September 2019, Cardiff (Bath, Bristol, Cardiff and Exeter universities)
- **Working nationally to promote the value of languages** and contest the 'monolingualism paradigm' via associations, such as UCML

Advocacy and Activism in the University Sector: UCML

- **Represents modern languages and cognate disciplines** to UK and devolved Government, the funding councils and other bodies at national level;

Recent: UCML Scotland: 'Widening Participation in Languages, Cross-Sector Annual Conference, 15 June 2019, University of Dundee

- **Collects and disseminates information** about the state of modern languages in the UK; Annual reports on UCAS data language trends

<https://ucml.ac.uk/2019/07/22/ucas-releases-data-for-2019-ug-application-cycle/>

- **Provides a forum for debate** on issues of concern through conferences, seminars and online reports;

See recent workshop 'tool kit' on surviving and thriving in difficult times:

<https://ucml.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/sites/201/2019/08/UCML-Surviving-and-Thriving-Tool-Kit-2019.pdf>

- **Presents the case for languages in the media**

Coordinated media campaign to protest the closure of modern languages at the University of Hull

Who is a Language Activist and What Can They do?

- Seek **common purpose** and work in partnership: UCML and severe grading

https://ucml.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/sites/201/2018/11/UCML-OFQUAL_statement_Final.docx-v3.pdf

- Need to **engage with government and policy makers**: co-working not contestation; opening up avenues for mutual benefit

<https://www.tes.com/news/we-are-struggling-hugely-languages-decline-dfe-admits>

- Making the case **repeatedly for LANGUAGES, not individual languages.**

<https://www.ox.ac.uk/news/arts-blog/modern-foreign-languages-time-rename>

- **Understand and act on the ethical imperative** to learn, understand and value the rich linguistic eco-system in the UK.

Contact Details

Claire Gorrara

Email: Gorrara@cardiff.ac.uk

Twitter: @gorrara67

