**AUPHF Brexit round table (SFS, Durham, 3 July 2017)**

These notes from the Brexit Round Table were collated by AUPHF Presidents Adrian Armstrong and Claire Gorrara. Colleagues should contact individual speakers should they wish to learn more.

*English perspectives: Stephen Forcer (Birmingham)*

**Challenges**: Stephen Forcer highlighted how MFL policy and curriculum in England often lag behind those of other UK nations, at least at secondary level. EBacc targets imply that MFL GCSE entries will rise to c.90% of pupils by 2020. More teachers will therefore be needed, whereas HE applications continue to fall. Forcer commented that too many English HEIs were fighting for too little resource and that staff as well as students are subject to uncertainty (EU citizens’ rights, future opportunities for a year abroad, etc.)

**Opportunities:** Forcer noted there has been some increase in the expression of positive views of Europe, notably among younger age groups. How can international students best be welcomed and inducted in future, and how will staff be able to negotiate the possibility/necessity of working abroad in transnational education (TNE) settings? There are also opportunities to target students of other disciplines who may have MFL interests. There is a shortage of native Anglophone interpreters, which could make it viable to develop degrees in Law and a Modern Language (court interpreting etc.).

For Forcer, a coordinated national plan would be desirable, to promote MFL through music, technology, etc. – possibly developed via students rather than teachers. HEIs in England could protect MFL provision through more merging and harmonizing – not necessarily at institutional level.

**Erasmus+ benefits** are often cited, but positive attitudes often provoke pro-Brexit responses. A body of opinion is developing to look at different, non-Erasmus, provision rather than seeking to maintain the status quo. Mobility could be extended to non-HE students, for instance. Forcer ended by asking what might we want to do if reinventing mobility for our students?

*Scottish perspectives: Jim Simpson (Glasgow)*

**Challenges**: Jim Simpson identified the need to protect the national skills base in languages, *and* diversity in the student population. A historical Scottish reluctance to learn languages can be seen as reflecting a kind of cultural cringe. Yet tackling inequalities must be a priority. Scottish children are relatively disadvantaged, though Scotland is also seen as relatively welcoming to foreigners.

There are forms of cultural amnesia in Scotland: there has been very little commemoration of, say, the 17-18 century diaspora to Russia, Sweden, and Poland. More generally, opportunities have been lost to consider, revive, or nurture international cultural contacts. More people in Scotland speak Polish than Gaelic, for instance; but Polish is not taught in schools.

**Opportunities:** Jim Simpson askedwill more local student recruitment take up the places for which EU students will no longer apply?

**Erasmus+** – there would be some sympathy for remaining in the programme, as the Scottish government is pro-EU. But could unilateral agreements be funded? Alternatives to Erasmus would, as ever, need to address skills shortages in Scotland. How could a programme be resourced?

*Welsh Perspectives: Claire Gorrara (Cardiff)*

**Challenges**: Gorrara outlined how the Welsh Government has pledged itself to supporting one million Welsh speakers by 2050. However, there are significant challenges for modern languages in Wales in steep decline in schools since early 2000s. The most recent *Language Trends Wales* reports show that fewer than 1 in 4 pupils are studying for a GCSE language. To counter these worrying trends, the Welsh Government launched, in 2015, a five-year plan to support modern languages in Wales called **Global Futures.** The strategy aims to improve visibility and uptake for languages (but it has no targets): to increase CPD for teachers and to deliver enrichment activities for students and teachers.

Brexit has offered real cultural challenges in Wales where the population voted Leaver 52/48. One of the first challenges for HEIs is to think about this in relation to potential undergraduates.Gorrara asked are the degrees we offer meaningful to a generation of students growing up under Brexit, above all in Wales with areas of profound economic deprivation? These are areas where uptake at MFL GCSE is very low - under 15% in part of South East Wales. Do we have a responsibility to rethink widening access and the intercultural dimensions of an MFL degree? Do we need to move away from the aspiration for a second monolingualism (native level competency) in favour of more plurilingual models?

**Opportunities** in Wales comes with the curriculum review under Prof Donaldson 'Successful Futures'. This will lead to proposed school curriculum where English, Welsh and ML will be clustered in a new Area of Learning Experience. This will offer the opportunity for Welsh, English and ML to work together and learn from each other. Will universities respond in kind? Could we open our programmes towards transnational perspectives and teaching?

**Erasmus+**: There is contingency planning and consideration around the size and shape of the year abroad. How can an immersive experience be offered and how could this be delivered differently to the current residency norms? What role could European cultural institutes and the British Council perhaps play for a Wales or UK wide time abroad programme? This could be an opportunity to review the purpose and outcomes of the year abroad and how we shape our undergraduate programme.

*Northern Irish perspectives: Margaret Topping (QUB)*

**Challenges:** These are challenges emerging across *all* disciplines in HE: the case must be made for the value of HE in general, not only MFL. Topping asked do we think/talk about MFL in different ways from our stakeholders?

NI voted Remain by 55/45. The land border and the peace process are major challenges. Negotiations cannot, as per their remit, undermine the peace process. This entails respect for linguistic diversity – including not only Irish, but the languages of ethnic minorities. Hence respect, tolerance, human rights, and belonging are all associated with languages.

Sensitivities around Irish Gaelic do impact on other languages to an extent. One major political persuasion (SF) tends to focus on values, the other (DUP) on financial bottom lines and numbers of speakers. Topping asked how will it be possible to negotiate these differing sets of expectations?

**Opportunities:** Foreign-language competence could be considered as part of an overall set of graduate-level skills and qualities. NI also needs to increase entrepreneurial activity – government support is available, reflecting the acknowledgement of the need to move outside one’s own cultural comfort zone. The case can also be made for the value of MFL outside the discipline itself: as key for innovative thinkers, who can think outside of familiar parameters through the perspectives of others. In concrete terms, innovation hubs could be developed to bring together children who speak different languages.