

In Conversation with: UACES Chairs

HELEN DRAKE SPEAKS TO JO SHAW AND RICHARD WHITMAN

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Facilitator: My name is Helen Drake and I am the current chair of UACES and I'm here with Jo Shaw, former UACES chair and I'm here with Richard Whitman, also former UACES chair, my predecessors in other words. Hello Richard, Hello Joe. I would like to ask a few questions about your time as UACES chair, so maybe the first question is just to test your memory and ask you to tell us when you were chair and what it was like for you being chair for example, how did you go about setting your agenda and your strategy?

UACES has a constitution, did that give you ideas or did you devise your agenda and your strategy from other sources? So, I don't mind who goes first, maybe Joe, do you want to go first?

Jo: Well, I am the older vintage so maybe yes. Although I think when I joined the committee in 2000, I think Richard might have been on the committee at that point?

Richard: I was, yes.

Jo: Then he left the committee and then came back again as chair later on. I was on the committee from 2000 to 2003, and then I was chair from 2003 to 2006. So, it's quite some time ago so you will appreciate that the memories are not necessarily that fresh. But none the less it was a great experience to be chair. That time I think was a crucial period of time when UACES was really building up its engagement with the student forum, and also was developing its internationalisation, I think those were two things that Clive Archer had already started and I was very pleased to carry on building those.

I'm not sure I innovated in terms of strategy and approach but I perhaps pushed a number of things in that domain which Clive had already started developing. One thing in relation to internationalisation was that you talked about the constitution; we changed the constitution so that that institutionalised having a member of the committee who was part of the growing group of members, now very significant group of members who are not based in the UK.

Of course the UK based group is very international because of the still strong internationalisation of British universities but very large numbers of people were now active in UACES who were based outside the UK. It seemed to me to be important to ensure that they had some voice on the committee so that they felt that it was more and more a European association and not just somehow a UK association that had some type of irredentist ambitions almost vis-à-vis the other European ECSA, the other European Community Studies Associations that are organised under the frame of the commission sponsored world ECSA.

So, those were some of the things that really inspired me in terms of my work. I'll pass to Richard now.

Richard: Well in between the two of us there was another chair, which was Alex Warleigh-Lack, so I came in from 2009 to 2012. I think it's interesting to look across that period because I think by the late 2000s we had already established, it was a well-established idea that the conference went overseas without it being something that was exceptional because you may remember when you were chair it was the Zagreb conference.

Facilitator: That was the first conference?

Jo: No, Budapest.

Facilitator: Budapest, okay.

Richard: Yes, there was an anniversary conference in Budapest but that was seen to be exceptional I think and then I think from Zagreb onwards I think really the idea was established that essentially because of the membership, it was an internationally focused association and therefore the idea should be that going overseas wasn't exceptional, it was part of the bread and butter of the way the association functioned. The fact that the conference really was for most people the centre piece of their engagement with UACES, and so we also had by that time established the idea that there was a very active competition actually to host the annual conference.

Whereas I think in the past the idea had been really that it was UK universities, I think one of the things that was very well established by the early 2000s was that we had overseas institutions that were willing, able and even to tussle between themselves to host the conference which I think was reflective as Jo said of the changing composition of the membership where we were the 50% mark in terms of the number of members who were non-UK based and then non-UK nationals. It was even larger actually in terms of the composition of the membership.

I think the other thing that we did establish by the late 2000s was what we might call the something that was always there in the history of UACES which was practitioner engagement. But I think it developed in a more structured way in a sense that we started having events in Brussels which were intended to sell European studies research back into Brussels. Which was an innovation under Alex and we had that established by that time. Of course the stable of UACES publications was also developed because JCER came into existence as well alongside JCMS and the book series also transferred from Sheffield University press to Routledge.

Facilitator: If I could interject perhaps on the internationalisation, along with Emily Linnemann, our executive director, we've been back to the early minutes, back to the late 60s when UACES began its life and there were interesting discussions we've seen from the papers not just the minutes. First of all about whether students should even be members, so it was not a student membership association at that point so it's interesting that you talked about the student

forum when you set up because that is now a very important aspect of UACES and that you both developed that.

But also internationalisation, looking back to those early papers there were discussions and in fact in the first ever mission statement the wording was along the lines of UACES in its early incarnation would have relations with continental universities and then some of the very first committee meetings talked about what those relations would look like and there was quite a strong opinion that other countries should have their own associations and it strikes me as current chair that one of the big developments has been the way that UACES is now the biggest European studies association in the world. Not just in Europe ...

Jo: It's bigger than EUSA now.

Facilitator: Its bigger then EUSA now, bigger then the European Union Studies Association which is the USA equivalent so yes, your efforts in these respects have been part and parcel of quite significant changes to the association and its remit.

Jo: I think that one of the things that UACES has evolved over time has been at the conference. When I first attended some UACES events and I think Richard's a predecessor to me than that because as an academic lawyer I was slightly more not quite so central to some of the disciplines at a certain point, although there had always been lawyers involved in UACES. But when I started to go to a few events then the annual conference was in January and that seemed like a very dark time of the year to have it.

Then somebody came up with the idea of having a research conference as well, which was the September one and that was very very lively and I think that coincided with the period of time when Drew Scott and Simon Bulmer were JCMS editors and they infused a lot of academic engagement and credibility and really took JCMS from strength to strength. That I think fed back into the idea of having the research conference, people came up with various opportunities to build that up, special events, anniversaries, one thing or another as the years went by.

By the time I took on being chair, joined the committee the September conference was established as the event. Although it's grown over the years, it still retains a certain size and focus that the large international conference don't have so you actually do think that there is some real academic work going on within the framework of the conference, it isn't just about networking. It isn't just about you've got to be there because it's hiring a venue and that type of thing. It has a genuine academic exchange dimension to it and I was delighted to see that you were playing around with different types of sessions this year.

Different types of questions about what academics do and should be doing in European studies so each chair brings their own dynamic.

Richard: I think I would agree with Jo, the game changer was having the research conference because prior to 1995, which was the first research conference I mean the winter conference as it was, was essentially a gathering of academics and practitioners and I think a lot of people thought it was a way of topping up

your lecture notes in terms of seeing what practitioners were saying about particular policy areas. But from '95 onwards of course what it also did then was create the capacity for people to be involved in the conference as participants by delivering papers rather than just being consumers of plenary type sessions.

In term that fed the internationalisation because then it was a conference opportunity that people could make paper proposals to attendants. I think originally it was every other year, I know the first one was Birmingham and I think the second one was Loughborough, the second conference. But for a while you are right, the two things ran in parallel didn't they?

Facilitator: You are right, going through the papers again the January one was a one day event and it was invitation only as in the speakers were by invitation only and it was not the great and the good but sort of prominent members of the profession plus practitioners. So, the research conference was supposed to be something very different and now they have merged. I would like to think that we have kept the best of both in that we still do have the plenaries and we still invite a speaker so that people can top up their lecture notes as you say while also participating.

Richard: One thing I know was also an anxiety and I don't know if it still holds is the sort of blend within the individual panels themselves, between more experienced academics and PhD students. Because I know it's something that we sort of agonised over in the past, make sure that it was useful particularly for PhD students, to have panels which provided that function. But I think also now that you've got the student forum, you've got that learning venue which is separate but obviously still connected to the main conference, haven't you?

Jo: The things grow in parallel but in terms of the development of ensuring that the early career researches get a good deal out of UACES, again this year you've introduced an early career membership.

Facilitator: A new tier.

Jo: A new tier of membership between the PhD students and as it was the four members which I think is important. It was one of these things of Oh, didn't we do that before? But clearly not.

Facilitator: It seems so natural. Sorry, if I could just add one of the things is that the early career tier, those members are full members in their own right, in the way that student members are full members in their own right as well as the more mature members shall we say so there is not a junior membership, it's just a recognising that they are at a different point in their career and so on. I'm glad that that has been noticed, it's a good thing.

Jo: I think what's important about UACES is the way in which understanding career development is organic to the organisation, to the institution, it's part of the DNA of institution. It's not a professional association that exists and then you have to be a member of it because you would be casting yourself out from your academic discipline. It's something different because it's between some of the different traditional disciplines. European studies has had to work hard to maintain its *raison d'être* to secure a future not just in the UK but in other parts

of academia in Europe and North America and so on where it's come under threat of what is it?

Facilitator: That does move us into perhaps the second broad questions, it moves nicely in which is the meaning. The meaning of UACES both for yourselves as academics and then for your careers more generally but yes, with regards to what some would not even call a discipline, European studies, so I would be really interested in your reflections on that, the significance of UACES, especially 50 years on in those respects.

Jo: Well, I've always been an inter-disciplinary scholar, my training is in law but I think one of the funniest things ever said to me at a UACES conference was "You're some sort of lawyer aren't you?" by which I think that was meant as a compliment but it's hard to tell. But I like to think that I have been able to work with both political scientists and legal scholars and bring some of the questions that they ask into debate with each other and be genuinely inter-disciplinary rather than just plurally or multi-disciplinary. That's where UACES can offer that opportunity to both be within your discipline but also to play with the lines that are between them.

As a lawyer as chair of the association I certainly felt very comfortable, I always thought of UACES conferences being one where I felt I could be in my slippers, I was very comfortable there and ...

Facilitator: It's a nice image.

Jo: Yes, and it wasn't somewhere where you felt you had to be somehow on your best behaviour and so on. I think that UACES conferences have existed in a way, in a good synergy with this inter-disciplinary field of European studies. That's what I like to think in the sense that it has continued to grow as a conference despite the challenges that the field has faced in the UK with the REF, the RAE and other things. But then of course we predated the impact agenda by working very actively with practitioners in a way that perhaps now ought to be bearing fruit, but who knows.

Richard: I've always thought about UACES more as a clan in the sense that people have quite a lot of loyalty to the association but it's not on the basis of the same kind of affiliation that you get with a discipline. In the sense that there is an acceptance of difference and different interests but at the same time what brings people together is obviously their interest in European integration, broadly understood even if they are coming from quite different disciplinary backgrounds. I think also the other thing that has been noticeable about the subject area is they haven't really suffered from theological disputes.

I think that also gives the conference a bit of a different feel because it's not as if the case that people sort of herd to particular panels because they have a sort of particular perspective or they work within a particular school which means they wouldn't necessarily go to another panel. So, there is more of an opportunity to graze I think in terms of different areas. But I think one of the developments that kept that but also helped things to allow for a bit more congealing in some areas such as the collaborative research networks and having things where there

are a group of people who perhaps have met through conferences, who have identified a shared research agenda, who have then been able to make a bid to be able to do thing either within the conference but also outside the conference in terms of pushing on an area of research.

I think that's been a far more successful model than the one that other associations have had were you have a sections for example or where you have groups which are much permanent standing structures. Which can sometimes become quite atrophied because it's the same old people who are doing those or working in them where as the CRN's are designed in a way to have a fixed term duration to do something and then a follow on CRN. But otherwise they would die sort of a natural death and then you get a new set of ideas come forward.

I think that combination has worked quite well actually, sort of having the general conference if you like, the general panels but also having the CRN's infusing the conference panels. But as I say also doing things outside and I also I think they have driven quite a lot of research that probably otherwise wouldn't have been there. Because their thresh hold for creating one is much lower than for example a large research project, the next 2020 type project where you would require much more leg work and obviously much more paper work to put something into existence.

Facilitator: It's very, if I could just sort of, in response to your insights there, maybe perhaps in particular to do what you said about the research networks and so on perhaps we are trying to publicise that sort of thing more in a time period now when we fail or that we detect, especially younger scholars careers are far more tightly perhaps circumscribed by institutional constraints and funding constraints and so on to the extent that we've noticed even a fall off in demand for things that we are giving in terms of funding for PhD field work, funding for these sorts of research networks.

So, it's good to hear that they do still represent an intrinsic value and that we can continue our younger scholars to take them up. But maybe to close on this subject without wishing to be negative, is it not the case that the academic career particularly in the UK, so UACES is concerned with that but not only perhaps does it squeeze scholars more do you think? In so doing push them towards the big beasts? Whether it's the big funding councils or is there still a role for our sort of offering which is not a big research council and so forth?

Jo: Well, you would have hoped so, there's always whenever I come to UACES conferences and unfortunately not every year, there are always a new early career cadre of legal scholars for the first or second time, who haven't been along before. There's maybe still more space to develop that interest and that engagement and perhaps also take on some of those leadership type roles. Leadership may the wrong word but leadership at the appropriate level if you will to launch a new network or whatever.

There is still enough space in the legal academic career to develop that, that it wouldn't be so constrained. I can't really speak for how the political science has become more regimented. I have a sense that that's the case.

Facilitator: You mentioned the REF, which is a factor there.

Jo: I have a sense that that has impacted quite heavily in other disciplines but I not perhaps the best to comment on that.

Richard: One of the periods that perhaps might have been the high in anxiety in European studies was the disappearances of European study as a RAE panel. Because certainly for UK based scholars that in terms of the way that research is measured you know that kind of plugging in to that unit assessment and when that disappeared I think it was potentially a moment of great vulnerability in terms of European studies within the UK. But I think it's interesting that UACES and European studies certainly in the UK have certainly weathered that storm.

It's also weathered the decline of language teaching which European studies were very much a part of and you've ended up with conferences which are still at the same scale. Which was the case with previously but I think one of the things that's absolutely consolidated now and I think this a great thing is that non-UK nationals are the sort of defining feature of the conference. The balance has shifted clearly across time and I think that's great news for UACES. I think it's also very very good new scholars of European studies in the UK, in the sense that you've already got a kind of network that you can plug into very easily.

At pretty low cost as well, I mean that's perhaps one of the other things that we don't give UACES enough credit for, is the sort of cost of access are quite low. I think not just the financial cost but also I think the cost of just sort of getting in there and being part of a panel and so on. Other professional associations have different mechanisms by which they would use conference papers, access points for people in terms of sections or parts of the conference and so on.

I think the gateway or the sort of gate keeping aspect to participation in the conference is set quite low in a positive way that allows people to come and sort of try and then potentially come back again which is not always the case with some other associations.

Facilitator: We've got enough time left to broach a third and final issues which is let's call it Brexit, that's the easiest way to describe the current situation whereby the UK has embarked on a process to withdraw from the European union. Now you both know as previous chairs that UACES began its life before the UK joined what was then the community and in fact the failure to join in the 60s on two occasions. As far as I can work out from looking at the papers was the spur to the creation of what has now become UACES as in a worried group of academics in the UK wanted to set up a group to learn about what was happening on the continent and then within quite a short space of time to study the accession process and then membership.

So, 50 years on as you know sort of one of the things that I've spent time on as chair this year, 2017, is 50 years since 1967 and here we are 50 years on with the UK negotiating to leave. So, I suppose my hope, my expectation is that UACES will outlive the UK's formal membership or current membership of the EU. There's even more to understand, we go back perhaps to being the worried

academics who feel we need a forum to understand what's going on and to understand what will become the EU 27.

That's how I pitch this and it would be great to hear from both of you whether it's advice or guidance for my successor, who in a year's time will be, whoever they may be will be taking up the chair, how do you see the association's future. You may not gaze into the next 50 years but how do you see the association's future in; let's call it a Brexit/post Brexit environment. Any thoughts, your insights are welcome.

Jo: I'm not sure I can say very much about how I would predict the association might go forward but I would like to say something about the role of law and legal scholars in all of that. Because I think there is a parallelism between the two phases, not just in the way that you described it but also in terms of how then at those two phases suddenly everybody becomes a European Union lawyer or as we would now say a European Union lawyer so as the same way that legal scholars were quite prominent in the early years of UACES, that perhaps the middle years was not so obvious.

In the same way that sort of epistemic communities of lawyers in different parts of professional and academic practice are clearly as people like Morton Erasmus have shown very clearly very much a part of engine of integration that got moving in the 1950s and 60s and into the 70s. So, in this field suddenly people are tweeting out little gifts of Michael Dugan telling one of the Houses of Committees exactly what a non-tariff barrier to trade is. I tried to asking leave campaigner's what they were going to do about non-tariff barriers to trade during the referendum campaign.

It was like don't be silly, it's all about tariffs and of course it's not about tariffs, I've been trying to teach about non-tariff barriers to trade for 30 years and nobody has been much interested. Now of course they are interested and we're all now European Union lawyers, we're all experts on Article 50, we're all experts on this, that and the other in a way that has always been there in an underlying way. There have always been those key lawyer political scientist collaborations that are crucial to the developments of the discipline and I'm thinking about Simon Bulmer and Kenneth Armstrong on the single market for example back in the 1980s.

But there is that sort of parallelism, so the one positive that you can take out of it in terms of inter-disciplinarily is that it really proves that you need people working together across the disciplines in a way that I think the ESRC program on Brexit has taken quite a while to get to grips to understand just how crucial competence are or voting issues. As well as regulatory questions about what do we understand by mutual recognition or what is the difference between the Norway option, the Canada option, and the Ukraine option and so on and so forth?

So yes, the centrality of legal solace ship to that process and legal understanding is at least something positive that we can take out of it and UACES has to be part

of that answer because of its capacity to bring those discourses into conversation with each other.

Facilitator: Thank you. Yes.

Richard: Maybe it's to a contrast between where things were in the late 60s and where they are now. I mean it was a smaller group of people studying but also people from quite different but connected networks. That you had other organisations like Chatham House for example where you had the same people, John Pinder who was the recipient of the first UACES lifetime achievement award, these were people who were a group of people who were all quite active in seeking to understand to explain but also to make the argument for UK/EU accession.

I think where we are now is clearly we've got more professionals who would suggest that they are studying the EU. We've got a far more diffused field and actually one of the challenges is how do you bring people together who are operating in their own individual silo's in a way that sort of make connections that are useful at this particular moment in time, so I think that is something that is worth thinking about because one of the big changes across time and you see this very clearly in the literature is that there were a lot of EU generalists.

Now we've got a lot of EU individual area or sub-area specialists and how you are able to marry those two things together. Which I think is a real challenge, but I think also perhaps there is an issue of moral, esprit in terms of at the start of the association there was clearly a project and a direction of travel which was that was the idea that the UK should be part of European integration process. Whereas now there is that uncertainty isn't there? As to what the destination might look like for the UK.

So, thinking further down the road is it the case that one of the core focuses is going to be the UK exceptionalism or is it going to be the case that we have sort of the recurrence of the older debates? Which is the re-entry trajectory or where is the UK in terms of being semi-detached and so on and that throws up all sorts of different issues, particularly for the study of the EU in the UK. But also how you then become a sort of blended association in a way with a lump of people who are on the outside all thinking about how you connect in a different kind of way.

Whereas the majority perhaps are preoccupied with how the show continues to operate.

Jo: Exactly, exactly. Because that's the difference so coming back to what we were talking earlier on in terms of a lot of the energy of the association coming from people for whom Brexit, everyone is saying well Shultz and Merkel didn't spend most of their debate talking about Brexit, well duh, of course not. It's the same I'm sure with many of the panels in the conference are quite rightly getting on with understanding new modes of governance, new different types of economic or geopolitical security threats and so on, you know understanding Russia.

So, maybe we cannot make the mistake of going in with British exceptionalism were we to go around the circle again maybe we can help to try and overcome

that. I'm sceptical as to whether that's possible in this sense that in wider society British exceptionalism is incredibly healthy and continuing and sadly a lot of people have just got a lot of thick sacking on their head and just can't really understand it. But maybe academics can play a role in trying to do that.

The fact that UACES has got this substantial group who are business as usual is a lot of questions that aren't just Brexit.

Facilitator:

On that note I think that is a good place to end that yes, it's not all about Brexit. Jo, Richard thank you very much, my time as chair has been made all the easier and more enjoyable by the foundations that you put in place but also by the fact that you are still part of the group, a clan sounds like others are excluded, it's not but that you are still here, you still come to the conferences and that means an awful lot I think.