

*UnSSEESing*

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**THE ALUMNI  
MAGAZINE  
FROM SSEES**

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*Featuring...  
Sunbathing, Satire,  
Students, Scholarships  
and more!*

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## Meet the new SSEES Director, *Diane Koenker*



*Image: Diane Koenker, credit: Jerry Thompson*

**I am greatly honoured to be appointed Director of SSEES. My own work has been enriched by access to its wonderful library collections over the past fifteen years, and I wholeheartedly embrace the challenge of leading this eminent institution in its second century.** Since 1983, I have been a member of the History Department at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, including service as department chair, editor of *Slavic Review*, and president of the Association for Slavic, East European, and Eurasian Studies. I am excited to utilise this rich experience on behalf of SSEES, its staff, its students, and its alumni.

I am an historian of Russia and the Soviet Union, whose work has been shaped by a deep interest in and empathy for ordinary people. My earliest research projects focused on the 1917 Russian Revolution and early Soviet Union, bringing together a theoretical interest in class analysis, along with worker agency, and increasingly, with gender as a category of analysis.

My most recent book, *Club Red*, a study of vacations and tourism in the Soviet Union, aims to explain the “other side” of the relationship between the state and the Soviet people, other than violence, repression, and controlled mobility. Most originally, the book reveals the tension between leisure travel as a state tool for creating loyal subjects and individuals’ appropriation of that tool to cultivate their own autonomous well-being, not necessarily to escape but to live their lives as they chose.





**Image:** *Sunbathers*

*Vacationers at the Gelendzhik rest home of the State Trade Employees Trade Union taking sunbaths, 1947. Note the nurse on the right monitoring a pulse. Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi archiv kinofotodokumentov g. Krasnogorsk, no. 0-189130. Used with permission of the archive.*

My new project, “Consuming Communism in the Soviet Sixties: Dining Out, Eating In, Buying, and Selling,” argues that the Sixties brought to the Soviet Union a distinctly new emphasis on consumption and consumerism. It focuses on the stepchild of the Soviet economy, the service sector. Although the good life required the communal provision of services like public dining and retail shopping, the Soviet Union’s productivist ethic emphasized the manufacture of things, and jobs in service were held in very low regard. I want to explore the origins and implications of these attitudes.

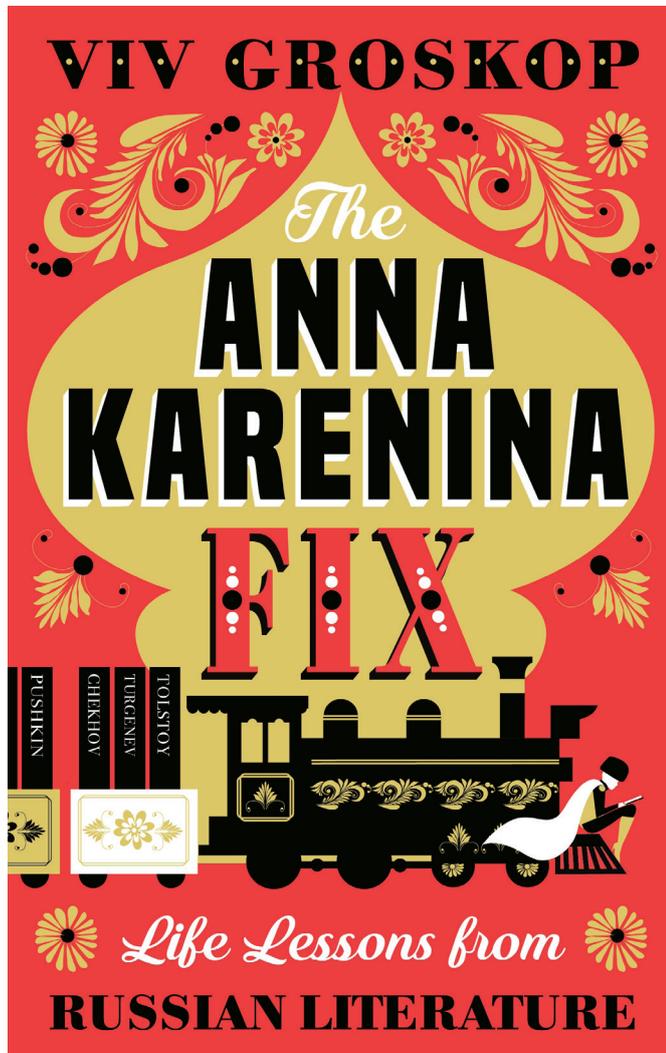
**Diane P. Koenker**

## SSEES EVENTS

Next Event: **East European Food and Drink Evening**, Autumn Term 2018, Date TBC.  
Keep an eye on your inbox for your invitations!

## My time at SSEES: MA Russian Studies (2001–2003)

by *Viv Groskop*



*Image credit: The Anna Karenina Fix – Life Lessons from Russian Literature by Viv Groskop, copyright: Penguin*

*“To write... a letter?” she asked, sarcastically,*

**When I was at SSEES I was in my late twenties and working as a freelance journalist. In some ways it seemed an inevitability that I would study at SSEES at some point.** I applied in the mid 1990s as a seventeen-year-old to learn Russian from scratch but although I had an offer, I turned it down because I was daunted by the idea of studying in London. I went to Selwyn College, Cambridge, for my undergraduate degree instead. By the time I had been living in London for almost a decade and was starting to wonder whether academia was a path I should have taken, suddenly I thought of SSEES again.

I studied part-time over two years for my MA in Russian Studies. It was a great course and everything I had dreamed of: informal but specialist teaching, the latest in debate and analysis in contemporary history, cinema and literature, a fantastic library.

I particularly loved my Advanced Russian course taught by the irrepressible Natasha Kurashova, a stickler for excellency and accuracy who was one of the best language teachers I’ve ever had in nearly five decades of learning half a dozen languages.

My post-graduate studies served me well as a journalist, boosting my contacts in Russia and my confidence in my Russian. During my time at SSEES I wrote articles for the *Sunday Times*, the *Telegraph* magazine, *Glamour* and the *Financial Times* from Moscow. Ten years on and I found myself back in the new SSEES library, writing my memoir *The Anna Karenina Fix: Life Lessons from Russian Literature*, which is infused with the spirit of the love of learning I absorbed at SSEES.



I also managed to fit the MA around my working life – and around the rest of my life too. By the time I took my exams I was heavily pregnant with my first child, Will, who is now fourteen and thinking about what languages he wants to study.

*One of my happiest memories of SSEES, though, is that it gave me back my Russian.*

No matter how well you speak a language, your proficiency drops when you're not living in the country. And in the years since my undergraduate degree my skills had slipped. The main goal for me at SSEES was to get my Russian back up to the level it had been when I was living in Moscow in the early 1990s.

Natasha Kurashova didn't let me get away with anything. I can remember telling her I wanted to be able to write fluently and professionally in Russian. "To write... a letter?" she asked, sarcastically, knowing that I meant I wanted to be able to write journalism in Russian and have it published (I was working for Russian *Vogue* at the time). "No, to write articles," I replied sheepishly. She gave me a look that said, "It can be done. But you will need to put the hours in." I did and it paid off. By the time I got my results – certificate in one hand, baby in the other -- I had also been promoted to Contributing Editor at Russian *Vogue*.

Viv Groskop is a writer, comedian and broadcaster. She has worked as a freelance reporter for 15 years, frequently travelling to Moscow and covering everything from the Nord-Ost theatre siege to Russian Fashion Week. She is the author of *The Anna Karenina Fix: Life Lessons from Russian Literature* (Fig Tree), published October 2017 in the UK, and forthcoming in the US and Russia. Her latest BBC Radio 4 series is *It's Just a Joke, Comrade: 100 Years of Russian Satire*. Look out for her 2018 Edinburgh Fringe show *Russian Doll*, currently previewing across the UK.

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*Image credit: Michael Sissons*

## Just where can you end up with a **SSEES History degree?**

**A SSEES degree, as we know, can take you all over the world. Here is just one example of the places you can end up when you study history.**

Christine Jackson graduated in 1980. Her working life has been spent in procurement, since 1987 for Crown Agents, where she has been involved in implementing and managing procurement programmes as well as reforms in the health, power and water and sanitation sectors. Apart from training and development programmes, she has also led teams of procurement professionals across the world, from Eastern Europe to Asia via Haiti. Here she writes about her most recent work in Ukraine, tackling corruption.

‘In 2015 the Ukrainian Ministry of Health entrusted Crown Agents to help tackle the systemic corruption plaguing the country’s public healthcare procurement.

A 2011 survey revealed that corruption pervaded the entire healthcare system. 70% of inpatients and 57% of outpatients had been effectively forced to make informal payments when accessing care in hospitals across Ukraine. Additionally, an audit in 2013 by the Ukrainian government estimated that the Ministry was overspending on vital oncological medicines by around 40%. This is made all the more acute by the fact that cancer is the second biggest killer in Ukraine.

In order to break the cycle of corruption, there would need to be a seismic social change. In the Ukrainian Revolution of Dignity of 2014. Corrupt officials were removed from their posts; which resulted in a gap in public procurement expertise.

It was clearly necessary to outsource the process, and so the Ukrainian Government turned to Crown Agents for help. Crown Agents is renowned for creating effective and secure supply chains in hostile environments. As the Hoover Institute at Stanford University puts it, Crown Agents offer ‘honesty for hire’.

Crown Agents was able to achieve a 50% reduction in the value of the Ukrainian hryvnia against the US dollar, while the same year-on-year quantity of drugs were delivered in 99% of cases, and the Ministry of Health’s overall net spend on oncological medicines went down by 37.9%.

My work is challenging but rewarding. I can definitely feel that it has made a difference.’



## SSEES Centennial Scholarship recipients

**In 2015 many of you contributed generously to the SSEES Centennial Scholarship Fund.**

The happy recipients are two BA students, two MAs and a PhD candidate. The BA students were selected on academic ability and financial need, the PhD and MA candidates on ability, though they also needed to be UCL-SSEES graduates. Here two of the recipients introduce themselves (the others will feature in the next issue).



### LAYLA GUEST

*Image credit: Layla Guest*

**I'm a first-year Russian Studies with Politics student and a member of the 'Leading Women' and 'International Relations' societies.** With a Russian degree and a specialization in politics, one of my main aims for life after UCL is to empower women in Russia by dismantling the patriarchal views in society and helping women become more equal to men both socially and in opportunities.

Receiving the Centenary Scholarship has motivated me to excel academically and personally. I am grateful that my ability has been recognised by SSEES, and that being from a less privileged background will not obstruct my potential to do great things.

The Scholarship has been massively beneficial for me. It has helped me purchase required books, attend extracurricular events regarding my course and save money for 4 weeks in Kazan next summer with university to improve my Russian. I would not have been able to fund student life without the additional money—especially not in London.

Ever increasing tuition fees and student debt were two major factors that almost deterred me from attending university. No one should ever be deterred from pursuing education due to their financial situation. I am so lucky to be pursuing my passions about as many others have not been as fortunate as I have been and miss out on the opportunity to attend university.

*Continued overleaf...*

*“Receiving the Centenary Scholarship has motivated me to excel academically and personally.”*



## SSEES Centennial Scholarship recipients (cont'd)



### ANNA DMOCHOWSKA – MA STUDENT

*Image credit: Anna Dmochowska*

**Although I am a native Londoner, my paternal grandparents were Polish refugees, and I have always had a keen interest in Eastern Europe.** Throughout my Russian with Polish BA at UCL, the quality of teaching and access to superb SSEES library proved invaluable, and I derived both information and entertainment from the range of talks and events at SSEES. Now on the MA Russian and East European Literature and Culture course, I continue to enjoy everything the university has to offer.

As I progressed through each year of academic study, my curiosity and drive to learn about Russia increased. It is something which I actively pursue in my free time by engaging with the Russian cultural presence in London, whether screenings and discussions at the Rotherhithe Russian Cinema Club or events at Pushkin House and the Anglo-Russian Culture Club.

My MA course presents me with varied opportunities to improve my Russian, something I find endlessly rewarding. I intend to base my dissertation on the poetic language of the Revolutionary period, hoping to turn this into a PhD project.

UCL has presented me with so many opportunities: I have met the US ambassador to Russia during the Cold War period, and an alumna who was personally acquainted with Anna Akhmatova. I have also been introduced to fascinating writers and critics; recently literally, when I met Viktor Erofeev and Zinovy Zinik following a roundtable discussion at 'The Open Russia Club'.

I feel very grateful for the education I have received so far from UCL and for the support of the SSEES Centenary Scholarship. This token of recognition has made it possible for me to spend evenings and weekends attending Russian conferences, such as the recent 'Revolutionary Dostoevsky: Rethinking Radicalism', and focusing on my studies rather than working part-time.

*“Now on the MA Russian and East European Literature and Culture course, I continue to enjoy everything the university has to offer.”*



## Interested in **Russian Affairs**?

If you are free Wednesday lunchtimes, do come along to the Post Soviet Press Group!

# POST-SOVIET PRESS GROUP

**Originally founded in 1988 by SSEES Professors Geoffrey Hosking and Robert Service, the goal was to bring together a diverse group of people – students, academics, journalists, and the occasional diplomat – to discuss the rapid developments taking place in the Soviet Union during perestroika. This academic year Dr Ben Noble has taken up the reins.**

Term 1 of 2017-18 has been action-packed for the Post-Soviet Press Group. From guest speakers to lunchtime discussions and the launch of a new publication, the Press Group is continuing to be a successful and popular discussion forum for developments in states of the former Soviet Union.

Lunchtime discussions have ranged over a vast number of topics: from the appointment of Supreme Court judges in Ukraine to the arrest of an FSB agent in Estonia; and from the presidential election in Kyrgyzstan to Georgian constitutional reform.

The Group hosted three guest speakers in term 1, and Edward Lucas (senior editor at *The Economist*) and Oleg Kashin (journalist and writer) are lined up as guest speakers for term 2.

The Press Group also launched a new online publication – the Post-Soviet Brief – the goal of which is to provide short analyses from SSEES academics and students on developments across the region. If you have an idea for a submission or for future guest speakers, feel free to contact the editor and Group convener – Dr Ben Noble, Lecturer in Russian Politics ([benjamin.noble@ucl.ac.uk](mailto:benjamin.noble@ucl.ac.uk)) – with a pitch.

Meetings of the Press Group take place on Wednesdays, 13:00-14:00. For more details, see the website ([www.ucl.ac.uk/ssees/research/research-centres/post-soviet-press-group](http://www.ucl.ac.uk/ssees/research/research-centres/post-soviet-press-group)). Those interested in receiving the Press Group's weekly email – including summaries of new items from across the former Soviet Union – can subscribe by following this link: <https://goo.gl/saMKtY>.

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## SSEES **Contact us**



### **SSEES CONTACT**

#### **Do keep in contact.**

Please don't forget to tell the Development Office if you change your contact details:

**<https://aoc.ucl.ac.uk/alumni/alumni-community>.**

If you have any questions about our activities or events, please contact Lisa Walters:

**[ssees-events@ucl.ac.uk](mailto:ssees-events@ucl.ac.uk)**

Join our SSEES Alumni association facebook group – we have over 350 members. Don't miss out on exclusive news and events.

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Newsletter edited by **Felicity Probert** with thanks to **Hannah Connell, Christine Krogfoss, Amy Hodgkin** and **Ellen Sowerby**.