

UCML Executive Committee

Friday 29th April 2022 10am-12pm
Via MS Teams

Item 10.c: Germanic/Low countries Studies

German Studies

The **Association of German Studies (AGS)** is holding its 90th conference on 5–7 September 2022. The conference will take place in person at the University of Nottingham and there will be panels on the usual wide range of subjects and periods. The society continues to invite applications for research and travel grants of up to £500 from PGR members. The AGS is currently redeveloping its website and making it easier to join online.

Women in German Studies (WIGS) holds its annual conference at the University of Leeds on 11–12 November 2022. The plan is for this to be a hybrid event. The 2021 WIGS Book Prize was won by Leila Essa (Utrecht; formerly KCL) for her project *Divided Nations, Shared Narratives: Contemporary Novels on Post-Partition India and Germany*. Leila won a prize of £150 and the opportunity to have her book manuscript considered by Peter Lang. The runner-up was Jenny Price (Weimar; formerly Warwick). The WIGS essay prize (£100, and the opportunity to have the essay considered by *German Life and Letters*) was won by Lauren Cuthbert (Aberdeen). The runner-up was Shivani Chauhan (Oxford). All prizes were awarded at an online ceremony in February.

For both the AGS and WIGS there has been a focus this year on equality and diversity. The AGS set up an EDI working group last summer and recently joined with WIGS to undertake an EDI membership survey. The draft report is currently with the committees and a full report with recommendations is expected soon. Findings will be reported in due course.

This year's **Heads of German meeting (HoGMeet)**, supported by the DAAD, will take place on 9th May at King's College London. It will be a hybrid event and will involve sessions on QAA subject benchmarking; EDI and German studies; impactful research; supporting German in schools; the AHRC FMLR fellowships. There will also be reports from societies and stakeholders such as the German Embassy.

In the course of the year many institutions have participated in the UCML year abroad SIG. Although visa issues for German-speaking countries have not been as profound as for other parts of the world, concerns remain about the sustainability of the year abroad, as well as the challenges posed by study abroad in particular for a growing body of ab initio students. Another visa-related issue shared by many institutions concerns the future viability of the DAAD and OeAD Lektor schemes, which provide heavily-subsidised, high-quality language teaching to the majority of UK German departments or sections.

Low Countries Studies

The **Association for Low Countries Studies (ALCS)** is preparing its first Summer Course for post-beginners learners of Dutch at the University of Edinburgh (3-8 July). The theme is 'Hoge Landen, Lage Landen' (High countries, Low Countries), and the course will combine language classes with workshops and field trips around the theme of Scottish-Low Countries connections. Places have been offered to 24 applicants. The ALCS biannual conference will also take place in Edinburgh (10–12 July) on the theme of 'Homing In'. Conferences now take place every other year to avoid clashes with the US partner organisation, the AANS (American Association for Netherlandish Studies), a system that seems to work well. Both Edinburgh events have received generous funding from the *Nederlandse Taalunie* (Dutch Language Union), who also offer a yearly working subsidy of €4000. Support has also been received from Flanders House.

The society continues to release three issues per year of the award-winning journal *Dutch Crossing*. It also awards small research grants, primarily to postdocs and PGRs to help with travel. Each summer there is both a UG and PG essay competition, with small cash prizes.

UG Dutch Studies programmes in the UK still face considerable problems, however. There are currently only two institutions in the UK that offer UG Dutch programmes: UCL and the University of Sheffield. At Sheffield, language teaching was moved to the University Language Centre in 21/22, and even though this meant a better contract for the language teacher, it also meant a broadening of the target audience at the expense of a more solid cultural foundation. This has happened despite very healthy student numbers. At UCL, there is currently no threat of closure or dispersment, but student numbers are worrying low. Given that UCL has a new provost, there are some fears that a move to 'consolidating' language teaching in the Language Centre may also be on the cards. As with Sheffield, this would signify a de facto end of the programme, as the consolidated efforts of several members of staff make the programme succeed.

The ALCS has been actively lobbying the embassies of Belgium (including the devolved Flanders House) and the Netherlands, as well as the Dutch Language Union) and interest groups such as the Anglo-Netherlands Society for their help and support. It also wrote a letter of concern to the Flemish Minister for Education to ask for help in re-establishing the Chair for Dutch Studies at UCL, vacant since 2008. As the Low Countries are UK's second biggest trading partner, consolidating the subject at a prestigious institution could help with soft diplomacy after Brexit. Representatives from the society will meet with the Department for Education in May and have been invited to a dinner with the Flemish Minister-President on his official London visit. The Director of the Dutch Language Union has also been invited to the conference in Edinburgh, where she is an alumna.

Sarah Bowden

26/4/22

(with thanks to Nicola McLelland (AGS) and Christine Sas (ALCS))

