

Germanic and Low Countries: UCML report, November 2023

The main concerns in Germanic and Low Countries studies still focus on a) sustainability and student numbers (esp. Low Countries studies); b) the year abroad; c) language teaching post-Brexit. In the first two areas there is little new to report, although proof of funds remains a problem for student visas to Germany; James Illingworth and the YA SIG are being extremely helpful in this area.

The sustainability of language teaching remains a huge concern, particularly for German. Most universities rely on Lektors and language assistants part-funded by the German and/or Austrian academic exchange services (DAAD/OeAD), a system that is under threat due to the new visa system—due both to salary thresholds and to the fact that the posts are advertised and appointed outside the UK. The British Academy has been working on our behalf and has finally elicited confirmation from the Home Office that a non-UK partner institution can contribute to the base salary. This is excellent news that potentially resolves the first problem (many thanks to Neil Kenny and others at the BA). Some universities (e.g. Oxford) have found workarounds for the second problem, but not all HR departments have been amenable.

Even more seriously, the DAAD, together with the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation, is set to suffer severe funding cuts from the German government. Many of its central activities and scholarships, which are of huge benefit to many in the UK, will be condensed or cancelled. Lektors currently in place will be able to complete their contracts, but it is not yet clear whether reappointments will be possible. UCML co-wrote a letter with the AGS and WIGS in July to the German ambassador about these cuts.

Some good news: in September, the Association of German Studies held its conference in person for the first time since 2019, with some blended panels. Many thanks to the University of Nottingham for hosting a well-attended, joyful event.

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