

Minutes of the AGS Business Meeting Minutes
79th Meeting, University of Newcastle
1 September 2016, 3.30pm

Committee present: Sarah Colvin (president), Margaret Littler (vice-president), Steffan Davies (treasurer), Frauke Matthes (conference), Ben Schofield (publicity), Anna Saunders (secretary), Stephan Ehrig (PG & EC)

1. Welcome

SC welcomed all present, in particular Dr Frane and Frau Schwarzer from the Embassy, and thanked them, alongside the DAAD and Goethe Institut, for their support throughout the year. Roel Vismans as the UCML representative for Germanic Studies, and Julian Preece as UCML Vice-President (Research) were also welcomed and thanked for their attendance.

Thanks were also extended to the Newcastle hosts and Frauke Matthes for the smooth organisation of the conference.

2. President's Business

a. *Members' news:*

Appointments, promotions, retirements and deaths for the academic period 2015-16 were announced.

b. *Conference dates:*

The dates and locations of future conferences were confirmed as follows:

2017 – Warwick, 6-8 September

2018 – Bangor, 29-31 August

2019 – Bristol, dates tbc

2020 – tbc; suggestions welcomed

2021 – Trinity College Dublin

c. *President's report:*

i. It had been a moderately difficult year for Modern Languages, especially given the uncertainties of “Brexit”. The number of A-level entrants went down again in England and Wales, and Peter Davies reported that there was a small dip in Scotland. The situation in Ireland remains healthy, despite a small decline, with recruitment still good. *Ab initio* numbers are, however, generally on the rise. Recruitment of PhD students is proving increasingly difficult due to the lack of Masters funding, and maintaining recruitment of PhD students who are German nationals might be challenging in the face of Brexit.

ii. On a more positive note, there were a higher number of A*s this year, demonstrating a change in marking structures. The Think German Networks are

proving successful, with new Networks being developed in Southampton and UEA, providing a total of 11 by the end of 2016.

iii. The situations in Nottingham and Birmingham were 'less bad' than originally proposed, with no compulsory redundancies. However, those concerned experienced considerable stress during the whole process. The universities of Nottingham and Birmingham both extended formal thanks for the support that they received from the AGS executive committee and from individual members.

iv. In recent years the AGS has increasingly adopted a campaigning role. It is working more closely with other languages associations through the Standing Committee of Heads of Modern Languages Associations (SCHMLA), which meets twice a year. The head of the IMLR and UCML attend these meetings once a year. The Alliance for Modern Languages in the UK has also been formed as a campaigning and letter-writing organisation, and plays an important role in the light of increasing cuts. If members have concerns about developments at their own universities, they are urged to contact UCML representatives and/or the President/Vice-President of the AGS, in order to trigger supporting action.

v. Jocelyn Wyburd will shortly be stepping down as Chair of UCML. SC urged members to become involved in the IMLR, UCML and HoGMeet in order to raise the profile of German Studies. There is also an important role for PG and EC members to play in this respect.

vi. It was announced that the Secretary and Publicity Officer were stepping down after six years of service. Thanks were extended to both.

3. Committee Reports

a. *Vice-President:*

Members were reminded of the submission dates for publication subventions (31 August) and travel scholarships (15 January and 15 August). Successful applicants will be featured on the website.

b. *Treasurer:*

i. The AGS finances are currently in a healthy shape. During 2015 a new Euro account was set up in Ireland. Thanks were extended to Christiane Schönfeld for helping to facilitate this.

ii. The Limerick conference required only a small subsidy (£1400), meaning that there was only a small overall loss at the end of 2015.

iii. AGS still has ca. £5k from the AMGS funds. Three types of activities were proposed that could be funded by this money:

1) Activities/running costs for the Think German Networks. Small grants could be offered where activities cannot be supported in other ways.

2) Engagement with headteachers, in order to encourage the study of languages, e.g. talks at headteachers' conferences.

3) Involvement of local teachers in the AGS annual conference, e.g. panel on teaching German / attendance subsidy for schoolteachers. This could be trialled, with a view to more permanent engagement, if successful.

iv. Income from membership fees only just covers an average annual spend. Once costs are covered, this leaves very little for PG funding and subsidy. Travel grants and publication subsidies often do not cover the full costs for postgraduates, and AGS would like to be able to support PGs more fully. It was noted that membership fees are also still being paid at different rates.

v. If AGS is able to register as a charity, this will also bring financial advantages in terms of VAT exemption and gift aid on subscriptions. SD will look into this further.

c. *Secretary:*

i. Membership is currently stable, with a good number of new postgraduate students.

ii. The committee is keen to encourage membership amongst schoolteachers, as well as a greater range of language teachers at university level.

iii. An increase in membership fees was proposed as follows: £50 (full time, permanent posts) / £25 (part time / retired / ECR) / £20 (PG – one-off fee valid for 3 years). During the discussion, a range of views was expressed, both for and against the proposal. The general feeling was that fees of £50 may be considered too high and lead to an overall decrease in members. A revised proposal of £40 (full time) / £20 (part time) / £20 (PG, one-off fee) was put to the membership and approved. It was also decided that members should have the option of making an extra donation (for the purpose of PG subsidy) and featuring on a list of 'supporters'. The point was made that these rates will need to remain static for the immediate future, as the administration involved is cumbersome. Direct Debits may, in future, be possible.

d. *Publicity:*

i. The new website will soon include a Paypal function, which will enable online payments and a database for updating membership details.

ii. Given limited time and resources, the website is not intended to become a hub for everything German, but will host an AGS archive and provide links/information to selected topics. It will, in future, also feature a carousel of books from the annual book launch, and will soon be more mobile friendly. With the new software, updating can now be done very easily.

- e. *Conference:*
 - i. Thanks were extended to Beate Müller and the Newcastle team for an excellent conference.
 - ii. The proposal at the previous Business Meeting to restructure the panels has led to a more lively programme. Thanks were extended to those who proposed panels this year.
 - iii. Institutions were encouraged to come forward to host AGS in 2020.
 - iv. The trial period for September conferences is soon coming to an end. An online poll will take place shortly in order to ask members to opt for September or Easter conferences. A decision will need to be made for the Bristol conference. The membership was open to the suggestion of conferences from Thursday-Saturday instead of Wednesday-Friday, if this suits the hosting institution better.
- f. *Postgraduate/Early Career:*
 - i. In this new post, SE hopes to facilitate greater communication with PGs and EC colleagues. In particular, he hopes to extend this beyond a facebook group, and to address the increasingly difficult transition from PG to EC status.

4. External reports

- a. *German Embassy (Fr. Schwarzer):*

A productive meeting was held at the conference regarding the Think German Networks; the Embassy will do as much as possible to support these. Now that the networks have been established, the next step is to consider the best way of maintaining impetus. Suggestions were welcomed.
- b. *UCML (Roel Vismans):*
 - i. Members can access analyses of useful data on languages and related discussions at the UCML website: ucml.ac.uk. UCML organises four events per year, including an AGM with a theme; in 2016 this concerned collaboration between schools and universities in the delivery of the new A-level curriculum. Members were encouraged to contact RV with concerns, ideas and suggestions.
- c. *IMLR (Godela Weiss-Sussex):*
 - i. A series of events began in summer 2015, in which the IMLR is taking a stronger position in terms of integrating modern languages methodologies and common understandings within the discipline. The next event takes place on 21 September and concerns modern languages and global English. Members should consult the website for full details.
 - ii. The Bithell series of dissertations has been taken back in house, and saw three new publications last year. Members were encouraged to look out for regular competitions for PGs, as well as for IMLR books.

- iii. Research training events take place for students across the UK, not just those in London. The IMLR will host a 2017 PG summer school in German, together with London colleagues.
 - iv. A writing competition organised with the DAAD, and supported by the Goethe Institut and the Embassy, will take place again this year. The theme is Migrants' Stories, and will be announced in late September/early October.
- d. *WIGS (Simone Schroth):*
- i. Henrike Lähnemann stepped down as President at the annual conference in 2015, and Brigid Haines was welcomed as the new Chair. Members were encouraged to consult the WIGS blog for further information.
 - ii. The annual conference will take place on 4-5 November in Aberystwyth. It will be preceded by a workshop for PG/ECRs.
 - iii. The inaugural WIGS book prize was announced in 2015 and awarded to Sally-Ann Spencer, whose work will be published with Peter Lang. There is also a WIGS essay prize, together with GLL. The current issue of the journal contains essays by the most recent winner and runner-up.
 - iv. WIGS' first early career workshop on alternative academic careers will take place on 9 September in Oxford and is open to all.
- e. *GSAI (Clive Earls):*
- i. A successful business conference took place in Dublin earlier this year entitled 'Darum Deutsch', addressing the skills shortage in Ireland. German language skills were identified as being in particularly short supply.
 - ii. The number of students studying German at universities continues to increase, although there is a fall in the number of schools offering German. More *ab initio* courses are being offered, which are proving popular. A Language for All initiative at UCD, TCD and Maynooth is being introduced this autumn. German is proving particularly popular in such initiatives.
 - iii. The proposal to remove the requirement for students to have a modern language in order to matriculate at the National University of Ireland has failed, and the decision has been postponed indefinitely.
 - iv. GSAI has had patchy success in integrating schoolteachers into its activities, given the different nature of their work. Successful activities have involved work on integrating literature and film into the classroom, as well as using drama with school pupils. Regional workshops have taken place in Dublin and Cork

v. Lobbying continues for a national languages policy, for which there is a working group representing all languages.

vi. The annual conference will take place on 18-19 November at Dublin City University.

f. *Screen Studies Network (Erica Carter in absentia):*

i. The network is entering a new phase, and will become a membership organisation. The website has changed to germanscreenstudies.eu and contains information on the annual conference.

ii. The network is keen to collaborate with anyone wanting to create funding bids around cinema, and is well connected with partners around the world.

5. Elections to the Committee Posts of Secretary and Publicity Officer

There were two candidates for each post. Following a paper ballot and count during the meeting, the successful candidates were announced and welcomed to the committee:

Secretary: Dora Osborne (nominated by Frauke Matthes)

Publicity Officer: Seán Williams (nominated by Steffan Davies)