

CONFERENCE REPORT: 2017

The Association of German Studies in Great Britain and Ireland convened for the eightieth time this year, visiting the University of Warwick. Postgraduates through to professors emeriti attended to talk about traditional as well as new topics. For alongside the usual “period” panels on, for example, the eighteenth century, this year saw the addition of themed panels — from subjects such as “friendship” to “gender after Queer Theory”.

As ever, there was a lead panel on a theme related to research strengths in the host department. Dr James Hodgkinson chaired *Sound and Sense: The Relationship Between Language and Music in German Culture Across the Epochs*. The series of lectures brought together Germanophone musicologists, musically inclined Germanists, and also colleagues interested in cultures of sound in the widest sense. Between them, they covered diverse topics from translations of “national” musical culture, music and the visual, to the politics of music and language, national identity and sound, traditions of German song, popular music, radiophonic culture, music and (written) literature... All of these themes can be studied from the viewpoint of German Studies, adding a new strand to what we do as part of our ever diversifying field of study.

Like all disciplines, the ways in which we conceive “scholarship” as Germanists — or even German Studies itself — are changing. Hence a welcome new feature of the AGS conference was a panel called “Doing German Studies Differently”, organised by Professor Rebecca Braun



(Lancaster University) and Dr Benedict Schofield (Kings College London). The papers were a set of concrete reports on work done, rather than aspirational or strategically aligned talks — so they showed the vitality and organic growth of research pursued in German Studies. We heard about a range of ways of successfully working with people and institutions beyond the academy, and explored the extent to which these encounters are giving us new ways of doing our research and placing it in society. As Rebecca said, “it

felt quite liberating to grasp the value of our work in German beyond the often rather depressing figures around undergraduate admissions and A-level uptake. I really hope we can repeat this kind of professional exchange of best practice in years to come”.

The falling numbers of school pupils opting for German is, sadly, a familiar story. But it is not all bad news. The AGS is in the vanguard of university staff working with teachers to inspire learners, share expertise, and generally foster better links between the class and seminar rooms. This year's conference innovation was a schools panel. Five teachers from local secondary schools were invited to give the audience a sense of the problems faced by the sector, but also presented some inspiring examples of teaching and project work. Generally, teachers would appreciate more interaction with universities and academics. Colleagues are invited to create personal links with teachers in their area to provide workshops or teaching materials. For pupils, it can be an inspiring experience to get a glimpse of university life – and think about carrying on to A-level and beyond. The [regional networks](#) have proven to be a good tool to facilitate exchange. The schools panel was much welcomed by delegates and will be 'upgraded' to a plenary standing panel at future AGS conferences.

Our Warwick conference said goodbye to Professor Sarah Colvin (University of Cambridge) as society president, thanking her for years of dedicated service. Incoming president is Professor Margaret Littler (University of Manchester), who said: "It is encouraging to see that research in German Studies is flourishing as never before. And this year's AGS conference has seen a productive liaison with schools, where German is most urgently in need of support".

The full conference programme is available [here](#).