



Director: Professor Katrin Kohl
Coordinators: Katharina Laszlo
Dr Madeleine Brook

Email: ogn@mod-langs.ox.ac.uk
www.oxford-german-network.ox.ac.uk

Oxford German Network: Report 2013 – 2014

The Oxford German Network had a successful year building on the projects launched in 2012-13 and developing new initiatives.

Website and social media: This was further expanded as a valuable source of local and national information and an effective means of engendering a sense of common purpose. Alongside our presence on the Internet, we maintain a Facebook page, and Twitter is a visible dynamic presence in the form of a live feed on the home page of the website.

Staff: The Coordinator funded by Magdalen College School provided vital administrative continuity and continued to be key to all OGN activities. Jointly with the Director, the Coordinator provided a vital active link between the University German department and local schools, ensuring that OGN activities responded to school needs. A complementary Faculty-based Coordinator financed by project funds organised the highly complex Oxford German Olympiad and other projects, while a further member of the team ensured an ongoing OGN Twitter and Facebook presence. Senior members of the University's German department contributed to our activities, with graduate and undergraduate ambassadors playing an important role especially in our schools-related events.

Teacher liaison and A-level policy-making: Termly meetings with local teachers hosted by Jesus College continued to provide a lively and productive forum for planning and discussing events and exchanging ideas. The meetings and other discussions with teachers were instrumental in prompting the Director to write an open letter to the *Guardian* on the subject of severe grading, highlighting the detrimental effect for modern languages across sectors of the exceptionally low proportion of A* grades at A level. The letter was signed by some 70 university colleagues in modern languages departments across the UK, and instigated a process that led to this issue being addressed publicly by Ofqual and the exam boards for A-Level exams in the summer of 2015. We will continue to monitor developments in this area. Liaison with local teachers in the context of OGN also proved very helpful in enabling the Director to contribute in an informed way to the new syllabus in Modern Foreign Languages A Levels to be taught from 2016, as a member of the ALCAB (A Level Content Advisory Board) panel on Classical and Modern Languages. ALCAB was constituted by Russell Group universities and funded by the DfE in the context of the Government's reforms of GCSEs and A levels, and held a number of meetings between January and June that culminated in a set of recommendations for AS and A level which will be implemented by Ofqual and the exam boards (<http://alcab.org.uk/reports/>). The Head of German at Cherwell School gave a presentation to the panel on the relevant needs and constraints from the perspective of schools.

School events: OGN organised a number of events in the course of the year. A visit to the Goethe Institut in the autumn term provided an opportunity to visit their fantastic library and see the film *Die Fälscher*, with discussion afterwards. Tom Attenborough, Assistant Director of a widely acclaimed production of Brecht's *The Resistible Rise of Arturo Ui* at the Duchess Theatre in London, joined up with Brecht specialist Tom Kuhn to give a fascinating insight into the production of this satire on Hitler's rise to power for a UK audience. A highlight was the second Christmas Biscuits event for Years 8 and 9, kindly hosted this year by Oxford High School, with some schools having preliminary bake-offs. Other events included a seminar led by Katrin Kohl on GDR literature, and a speed-dating and pub quiz event, both hosted by Radley College. OGN contributed to the Oxford Weidenfeld

Translation Day with a German translation workshop on Erich Kästner's *Emil and the Detectives*. Later in the academic year, Jesus College was the venue for a series of German Reading Group events for sixth formers and one event for Year 9, which were led by members of the German department and OGN Undergraduate Ambassadors.

Oxford German Olympiad: The second round of the Olympiad again proved an enormous success, involving participants from a wide range of age groups and types of school from across the UK. The main topic was "1914", a topic that was designed to engender interest in working with historical sources in the context of the widespread debates about the First World War, and the role of Germany. The tasks were wide-ranging and focused both on historical topics and the arts, literature and other areas of social activity at the time. Some of the entries were extremely creative, and there was evidence of productive collaborative work between pupils and in one case across schools. Further prizes were sponsored by software company SAP ("Networking in German"), the Oxford Kafka Research Centre ("Kafkaesque Stories") and the Goethe Institut ("German for the Future"). The prize-giving event was hosted by our partner the Bodleian Libraries in the beautiful Divinity School, with guest speaker Michael Steiner, a great-nephew of Franz Kafka, awarding the prizes. Prize-winners were given a special tour of the Bodleian's exhibition "From Downing Street to the Trenches" by the curator, on the opening day.

Local and national engagement: OGN continued to play a part in the City's Oxford-Bonn Link group, after contributing to hosting the visit from the partners in Bonn in 2013. Throughout the year, OGN worked closely with the German Embassy and their partners to extend the university-led network concept to other parts of the country, with the brand name "Think German Networks". The first new networks got off the ground in the course of the year and further ones will be launched in 2014-15. OGN is providing a "Best Practice" model, and the Director is acting as Coordinator for the initiative during the start-up phase, and the Association of German Studies will in due course host a web-page dedicated to the Networks. OGN has also been engaging with businesses as a member of the German-British Chamber of Industry and Commerce.

Funding and other support for special projects: In addition to the generous ongoing support by the Founding Partners, the Oxford German Network was fortunate in receiving funding from the Ferreras Willetts Family for schools outreach activities, and from Routes into Languages South for the Olympiad and other activities. We also obtained a University grant for Knowledge Exchange activities, which allowed us to employ a Research Assistant to continue work on the project of "Joining up German Teaching in the UK", building a database and developing communication channels that permit networking among schools and the tertiary, secondary and primary sectors. In the context of the grant we were also able to establish a new scheme of Research Library Internships in conjunction with the University Career Service, the Bodleian Libraries, and a German government funded consortium of major German research libraries in Marbach, Weimar and Wolfenbüttel. Seven graduate interns gained experience of many different aspects of work in a modern research library for two weeks over the summer, with funding provided mainly by Santander. We are exploring possibilities of further internships and other career-related activities.

The Director wishes to thank the Oxford German Network's Founding Partners, the members of the Oxford Network team, and the Undergraduate and Graduate Ambassadors for their commitment, creative ideas and proactive support over the year.

Katrin Kohl
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