The State of Dutch Studies in the UK and Ireland
A Study into the Provision of Dutch Language and Culture Teaching in Higher Education, 2017-18
The Association for Low Countries Studies (ALCS) supports and promotes the scholarly study of the language, culture and history of the Low Countries in the United Kingdom and Ireland. In addition to publishing a scholarly journal, Dutch Crossing, Journal of Low Countries Studies, the ALCS organises regular events such as the Biennial International Conference, the Postgraduate and Early-Career Symposium and the ALCS Undergraduate Student Days.

The ALCS also represent the interests of Low Countries Studies at national level and is a member of the University Council for Modern Languages (UCML) and UKCasa, the UK Council for Area Studies Association.

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MEMBERS OF THE ALCS EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE 2017-18:

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University of Newcastle

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Dr Henriette Louwerse (chair)
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Christine Sas
University College London

Dr Ulrich Tiedau (editor Dutch Crossing)
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About the Association for Low Countries Studies

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This report, commissioned by the ALCS, is a snapshot of the provision of Dutch Language and Culture Studies within the HE sector of the UK and Ireland. A similar stocktaking exercise was carried out in 2006, and before that in 1992. These state of the subject reports provide an informed basis to measure the health of the subject and to plan for the future. Sadly, it is clear that such strategic planning is more necessary than ever before.

The current report shows an alarming reduction in the provision of Dutch Language and Culture Studies at degree level. It is this crisis in Dutch Studies provision for undergraduate students that prompts us to call for immediate action to protect Dutch Studies in the UK and Ireland from sustaining irreparable damage and thereby prevent the loss of essential specialist language and culture expertise.

This report concentrates specifically on the provision of Dutch language and culture teaching, but our findings are not unique. Other less widely taught languages are facing similar threats. The British Council concludes in its 2017 report Languages for the Future that we have reached a “critical juncture” for language learning in the UK. The ALCS shares that view and calls for a national policy on languages in which specialist language knowledge is given strategic protection within UK universities.

Likewise, we call on Dutch and Flemish authorities to recognize the importance of mutual language and cultural expertise, to further economic, diplomatic, academic, cultural and creative ties between the Low Countries and the United Kingdom and Ireland. We want to defend our young people’s opportunities to become part of the rich history of international ties between the UK and Ireland, and the Netherlands and Flanders.

In order to guarantee a future for Dutch Studies in the UK we need to maintain a critical mass of undergraduate and postgraduate students, tutors and researchers. It is time to take action.
1. Background and Context

This report by the Association for Low Countries Studies (ALCS) outlines the state of Dutch Studies as an academic subject in the UK in 2017. A similar stock taking exercise was carried out in 2006. The main finding of the 2006 Lying Low report was a decrease of 28% in the number of Higher Education institutions in the UK and Ireland that offered Dutch Studies as a significant component of a modern language degree compared with those that did so in 1992. Since the publication of that 2006 report, the academic world has seen profound changes. The two most notable events in the context of this survey are the introduction of a new fees regime in England in 2012 and the Brexit vote in the 2016 EU-referendum.

New priorities continue to emerge as the sector increasingly adopts a short-term business model and international relations and institutional collaborations are redrawn in preparation for the as yet still unknown post-Brexit settlement.

Enrollments for degrees in modern foreign languages have entered a steeply decline across the board in recent years. On 30 June 2017, five years after the introduction of the new fees system in the UK, UCAS figures showed a drop of 22.8 percent in the applications for European Languages degrees compared with the same point in 2012. This strong decline has given rise to concerns about the economic, diplomatic and cultural impact of a national language deficit in a post-Brexit era.

1.1 BRITISH COUNCIL: DUTCH IS A TOP 10 LANGUAGE

Knowledge of languages and cultures is vital for successful international relationships at all levels, according to the British Council. Their 2017 report, Languages for the Future, includes a top ten of those languages, "which will be of crucial importance for the UK’s future prosperity, security and influence in the world. The indicators applied include language needs for businesses, diplomatic and security priorities, international education and English proficiency in the other countries."

In the table showing the overall result, Dutch ranks at number seven, the sixth most important language in UK job vacancies, the third most important language when it comes to language demands in export markets, and the fourth most important language when it comes to international education.

In addition, the Netherlands is flagged up as the third most popular destination country for UK students when it comes to international mobility.


3 Lying Low p. 7. In 1992, seven HE institutions offered Dutch from Beginners to Advanced level at a single or dual degree Honours Degree. This number dropped to five in 2006. Currently only UCL and Sheffield fulfill the criteria, which constitutes a decrease of 60% compared with 2006.

4 Alison Kershaw, ‘Fall in number of students taking up foreign languages prompts Brexit concerns’, The Independent, 4 August 2017.

5 Languages for the Future, p. 4.

1.2 DEPARTMENT OF BUSINESS, INNOVATION AND SKILLS: LANGUAGE = (SOFT) POWER

The UK government should be fully aware of the economic value of foreign language skills, particularly in a period when close collaborative structures are no longer a matter of course. After all, a report to UK Trade and Investment commissioned by the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS), concluded that a lack of language and intercultural skills is costing the UK economy around £46bn a year (3.5% of GDP). Only 6% of the global population are native English speakers, with 75% of the world unable to speak English at all.

Sian Cain, 2018

In addition to the loss of revenue as a result of language competency, the deficit of language skills in the workforce could lead to an overreliance on anglophone export markets in a post-Brexit UK. A panel of experts recently basted the myth of English as the world’s lingua franca: “Only 6% of the global population are native English speakers, with 75% of the world unable to speak English at all.”

1.3 BRITISH COUNCIL: LANGUAGE = (SOFT) POWER

Knowledge of other languages and cultures is not just an economic necessity. According to the British Council, it is also a requisite for building “trust, [and] deeper[ing] international influence and cultural relationships.” The UK will have to stand its ground in a competitive international environment, in which knowledge of more than one language and culture has become the norm. Leaving the EU will put greater emphasis on bilateral relations with European partners, including the Low Countries.


7 Gabrielle Hogan-Brun, ‘How Britain’s monolingualism will hold back its economy after Brexit’. The Conversation, 31 March 2017. Available at: theconversation.com/how-britains-monolingualism-will-hold-back-its-economy-after-brexit-72244

8 Sian Cain, ‘British “linguaphobia” has deepened since Brexit vote, say experts’, The Guardian, 28 May 2018.

9 Languages for the Future, p. 6.

10 Ibid, p. 32.

1.4 RESPONSE TO DECLINE ACROSS THE HE SECTOR

Although our research has not looked into the motivation behind scaling down or scrapping language programmes at individual institutions, a drop in income due to a decline in student numbers and a subsequent drive to optimise the teaching provision appear to be important factors. In addition, the comparative and transnational research agenda – partly steered by UK funding councils – has put the assumed value of individual languages and language area-specific cultural knowledge under pressure.

In the absence of a national foreign language strategy, the decision to offer modern language degrees lies with individual HE institutions. The marketisation of the HE sector and the ensuing drive to balance the books in challenging times puts additional pressure on languages departments, which are relatively expensive due to small student numbers and a teaching intensive programme.

Less widely taught languages are particularly at risk. The case we present for Dutch in this report is not an isolated one, a similar story could be told for other less widely taught languages. What makes the case of Dutch particularly pertinent is the identified economic and cultural significance of Dutch Studies for the UK.

Dutch ranks two places below German in the British Council top ten most significant languages, yet the provision of German Studies at degree level is twenty times greater than the provisions in Dutch. In 2017, according to UCAS, 61 institution offered German as opposed to 3 offering Dutch as a substantial part (beginners to advanced) levels) of an Honours Degree. With the scaling down provision at Nottingham (since 2017), there are only two institutions left: UCL and Sheffield.

What makes the case of Dutch particularly pertinent is the identified economic and cultural significance of Dutch Studies for the UK.

ALCS, 2018
2. Main Findings and Recommendations

This survey, which was carried out in 2017, aims to offer an overview of the state of Dutch Language and Culture teaching in Higher Education in the UK and Ireland. Its main objective was to map the provision of Undergraduate Language and Culture Courses in Dutch Studies within traditional Languages Degree Programmes in order to measure the findings against the 2006 benchmark.

We also wanted to get a clearer picture of Dutch courses taken by ‘non-specialist’ language learners. These are generally offered within Institution-Wide Language Programmes organised by University Language Centres.

Given the central role of the student experience in today’s Higher Education, we wanted to include the student voice in our 2017 survey. We have widely canvassed the views of undergraduate students in order to get a clearer view on why students opt for Dutch as part of their degree and how they think Dutch will contribute to their future career. We also included a question about which aspects of their courses they enjoyed the most.

2.1 MAIN FINDINGS

- Dutch Studies, which we define as the language and culture studies of the Netherlands and Flanders, has seen a drastic decline since 2006. The UK-wide provision of Dutch as part of a University degree has declined by 60% since 2006, from five to two institutions.
- The most notable decline is found at University College London, which has a significant drop in the number of both students and staff members.
- A striking loss is the closure of the thriving Dutch Studies section at the University of Nottingham, where Dutch is being phased out despite significant student interest.
- Dutch Studies at Sheffield is bucking the trend, showing a modest increase in undergraduate student numbers since 2006.
- The University of Cambridge has reduced their Dutch provision to a single language and culture module within German.
- Trinity College Dublin discontinued Dutch as part of their Degree programme. The Language Centre still offers Dutch language courses as part of the institution-wide provision.
- Institutions that have ceased to offer Dutch altogether (often as part of their IWLP): Aberdeen, Bath, Brighton, East Anglia and Leeds Beckett.
- The steady decline in staff numbers signalled in the 2006 Survey has continued. In 2017, only 32% of teaching staff in Dutch is on a permanent contract. The reliance on tutors with a fixed term contract and on hourly paid staff, including postgraduate students, has increased. This has serious repercussions for the stability of the subject, particularly in institutions with only one or two members of staff.
- The imbalance between target language and home language speakers among staff members has not improved since 2006. The number of native speakers of English involved in teaching Dutch is still low.
- The number of active researchers identified in the field of Dutch Studies – excluding the historians and art historians – is shrinking. Research is largely dependent on the efforts of a small number of individuals.
- Students that opt for Dutch generally feel valued and are pleased with their course.
- The number of students that opt for Dutch as an additional module – so outside of their degree programme but as part of the so-called Institution Wide Language Programme (IWLP) – is on the increase.

2.2 RECOMMENDATIONS

What is emerging is a discrepancy between, on the one hand, the economic, social and diplomatic demand for knowledge of Dutch language and culture and, on the other, the sharp decline in the provision of Dutch at Degree Level. Unless the provision of Dutch and Flemish Studies is significantly strengthened at Degree Level, there will be a structural deficit of Dutch language and cultural expertise in the United Kingdom and Ireland.

RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE EDUCATIONAL AND ACADEMIC AUTHORITIES OF THE UK AND IRELAND:

Languages and intercultural competence will remain strategically important for Ireland and particularly for a post-Brexit UK. Based on the findings of the 2017 report, our most important recommendations are:

- Faced with a continuing general decline in the study of modern languages, we call for a strategic protected status of particularly those languages identified as significant for the future prosperity of the UK.
- The current undergraduate provision of Dutch Studies at Degree Level with two remaining anchors at UCL and Sheffield must be strengthened.
- We ask that educational and academic authorities support the re-institution of at least one named Chair of Dutch Studies in the UK.
- In addition, we call for the expansion of the offer of Dutch Studies at Degree Level within the UK Higher Education sector in particular in those institutions that already have a proven interest in Dutch, such as Newcastle, Nottingham, and Cambridge, or a thriving IWLP in Dutch, such as Manchester and Edinburgh.
- Reinroduce Dutch Studies as part of a Language Degree Programme in at least one HE Institution on the island of Ireland.
- Encourage the development of bi- or multilateral relationships with universities in the Netherlands and Flanders.

A UK strategy for languages would mean that UK businesses can participate fully in the global market place using the language and communication skills of their workforce.

Professor Wendy Ayres-Bennett, University of Cambridge

RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE ALCS AND THE LOW COUNTRIES STUDIES COMMUNITY IN THE UK AND IRELAND:

- Maintain the provision of high visibility events such as the Biennial ALCS Conference, the ALCS Undergraduate Days, and the ALCS Postgraduate Symposium. They are pivotal for the health and visibility of Dutch Studies in the UK and Ireland.
- Gather evidence and develop a narrative around Dutch Studies as a choice that significantly broadens career options.
- Broaden the mission of the ALCS by including colleagues and students from Language Centres where Dutch is taught as part of the IWLP.
- Keep strengthening the field of anglophone Dutch Studies by seeking alliances and collaborations with international colleagues, particularly in the US.
- Encourage the journal Dutch Crossing: Journal of Low Countries Studies remains a high profile publication and consider Open Access as a way to broaden the journal’s reach and impact even further.
- Seek alliances and connections through interdisciplinary and cross-national research and maintain a presence in the increasingly important field of translation studies.
This survey’s primary aim was to obtain a snapshot of the provision of Dutch Language and Culture teaching in higher education in the UK. We were particularly interested in the provision of Dutch Studies within Modern Languages or Combined-Honours Programmes. A secondary objective was to establish the state of Dutch within Institution-Wide Language Programmes (IWLP) activity across the Higher Education sector in the UK and Ireland. In order to gather the data we used an electronic questionnaire, which was sent out to 24 universities in the UK and Ireland during the Spring Semester of 2017. We received responses from 50% of the institutions. The total number of responses was 82: 67 student responses and 15 staff responses.

This survey has its limitations. It has proven particularly difficult to ascertain the exact figures and state of affairs for Dutch IWLP courses. We found that IWLP staff are often only loosely integrated into the university structures and difficult to contact directly. We suspect that many institutions did not respond to this survey because our questionnaire never reached the right colleague. As an alternative we supplemented our IWLP data with the findings of the 2017 UCML-AULC Survey of Institution-Wide Language Provision in universities in the UK.\textsuperscript{11} We will discuss the findings on IWLP in Dutch separately.

In the fields of history and art history in particular, there will be modules with a Low Countries focus on offer at universities in the UK and Ireland.\textsuperscript{12} These anglophone Dutch Studies courses are of great interest to the ALCS, but fall outside the remit of this study, which focuses on the Dutch Language and Culture provision within Language Degrees.\textsuperscript{13}

From our data emerged an alarming picture of the shrinking provision of Dutch Language and Culture Studies at undergraduate degree level in the UK and Ireland. Discontinued programmes in Cambridge and Nottingham have followed the scrapping of Dutch Studies at the University of Hull; the only named Dutch Department in the UK at UCL has been decimated. Student numbers overall have declined by over 35%. The details will be discussed in Section 4.

There is positive news too: there is a slight increase in the offer of Dutch as an IWLP language. Truly uplifting, too, were the overwhelmingly positive comments of the Dutch degree and IWLP students, who were highly complimentary about their courses and tutors (or angry at the discontinuation of the subject). The student response is discussed in Section 5. Finally, Section 6 will cover staffing and research.

\textbf{I am intrigued by the development and evolution of language and by studying Dutch, a language closely related to English, I have discovered so much about my own mother tongue in addition.}

\textit{Undergraduate Student, University College London}


\textsuperscript{12} For example, the module ‘Genre Painting in the Age of Vermeer’ offered as a Final Year Module for BA Art History Major at University College Dublin or ‘The Holocaust. The Destruction of European Jewry’ as a Special Subject module within a BA in History at the University of Sheffield.

\textsuperscript{13} It is worth noting that in addition to departmental courses and IWLP courses, there are departments outside of Arts and Humanities (e.g. Engineering, Physics, Biology, Chemistry) that have extensive contacts with the Low Countries through exchanges and collaborative research programmes. Beyond the two PhD responses we received from the University of York (Biology and Physics), we are unaware of the type of linguistic preparation (if any) that takes place as part of these projects.
4. Dutch Studies as an Academic Discipline

The 2006 Survey mentions five institutions that offer Dutch-language and culture courses as part of a named degree: Trinity College Dublin, Cambridge University, Nottingham University, UCL, and Sheffield. There are currently two institutions left that offer Dutch-language and culture courses as part of a Modern Language or Joint Degree Programme.

4.1 UNIVERSITY COLLEGE LONDON

The UCL Department of Dutch is the long-established bedrock of Dutch Studies in the UK. The Department, founded in 1919, is the oldest of Dutch in the anglophone world, with many famous scholars among its previous staff. UCL has an active research organisation, with regular events for expert, student, and wider audiences interested in Low Countries Studies. UCL has also been the home of the ACLLE’s award-winning interdisciplinary journal Dutch Crossing: Journal of Low Countries Studies. Established in 1977, Dutch Crossing is the only A-listed academic journal in Low Countries Studies. It has consistently found a worldwide audience (partially due to its use of English) and is a highly valued publishing channel for scholars from a variety of disciplines, including art history and medieval literature. UCL Press also publishes a wide range of titles on Low Countries Studies in its book series ‘Global History and Medieval Literature.’

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The strength of the Dutch Section at Sheffield is its location within a vibrant Germanic Studies section and latterly within a School of Languages and Cultures that allows for maximum flexibility for students to choose from the same number of languages as within a BA Modern Languages. Institutional barriers are low, and there is still a policy of protecting ‘less widely taught’ languages as part of the broad language offer. The School of Languages and Cultures offers a MA in Germanic Studies with a Dutch pathway and Dutch as one of the specialist languages in the MA in Translation Studies.

The Centre for Dutch and Flemish Studies at Sheffield is a hub for the University’s Dutch-speaking student population. The Centre’s activities include regular events for students, such as the Centre’s lunchtime seminars, which are an excellent opportunity to learn more about academic events in the Netherlands and other Dutch-speaking countries, and annual events such as the Centre’s ‘Dutch Film Night.’ The Centre’s events are open to all students and the broader public.

Sheffield is well connected outside the UK too, with a close collaboration with De Lakenhal, Dutch-Flemish House of Culture, in Brussels. Sheffield currently holds the chairship of the International Society of Dutch Studies (Internationale Vereniging voor Nederlandse Taal-, Land- en Cultuurwetenschappen), a learned society with over six hundred members worldwide.

In 2018 Sheffield has the only occupied (Personal) Chair in Dutch Studies in the UK. The Chair, a 1.0 FTE University Teacher on a time-limited contract, is open to all students and the wider public. The Centre organises cultural activities for students and the wider public. The Nederlandse Vereniging is a student-led society that adds to a lively study environment.

4.2 UNIVERSITY OF SHEFFIELD

The second centre of Dutch Studies is the University of Sheffield (since 1948). In terms of undergraduate students numbers, Sheffield is the undisputed leading institution in the UK. Sheffield is the only institution bucking the trend in the autumn of 2019. However, the celebrations will take place with dark clouds on the horizon, not just for the institution but for Dutch Studies in the UK more broadly. This report identifies the demise of Dutch at UCL as the greatest threat to Dutch Studies in the UK. With its strong contribution to a global research community and its excellent publication infrastructure, Dutch at UCL is the backbone of Dutch Studies in the UK. The Department, founded in 1919, is the oldest of Dutch in the anglophone world, with many famous scholars among its previous staff. UCL has an active research organisation, with regular events for expert, student, and wider audiences interested in Low Countries Studies. UCL has also been the home of the ALCS’s award-winning interdisciplinary journal Dutch Crossing: Journal of Low Countries Studies. Established in 1977, Dutch Crossing is the only A-listed academic journal in Low Countries Studies. It has consistently found a worldwide audience (partially due to its use of English) and is a highly valued publishing channel for scholars from a variety of disciplines, including art history and medieval literature. UCL Press also publishes a wide range of titles on Low Countries Studies in its book series ‘Global History and Medieval Literature.’

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4.3 DISCONTINUED MAJORS

The leadership at the University of Nottingham, the third provider of Dutch Studies in the UK, decided to phase out Dutch as a named part of a languages degree from 2017-18 onwards. This decision was not taken in response to dwindling student numbers. Student numbers at Nottingham were healthy and the programme received much student appreciation and external support. Nottingham is a valuable partner within the UK-wide Dutch Studies collaboration. It is unclear whether Dutch will continue as an IWLP language. In our survey, Nottingham students expressed strong disapproval of their university’s decision to cut the programme.

The University of Cambridge has reduced its Dutch provision after the retirement of the permanent, research active member of staff in 2014. Prior to 2014, Dutch was an independent major that offered Dutch language from Beginner to Advanced level as well as papers in literature and culture, often integrated. Since 2015, Dutch has become part of the German and Dutch Section within the Faculty of Modern and Medieval Languages. At present, Dutch at Cambridge offers an intensive module covering both language and literature. The module, run by a single member of staff, is open to all students within the MML faculty and is regularly oversubscribed (student numbers are capped at 15).

4.4 NATIONAL INTEREST

Language Departments in HE Institutions are feeling the pinch. As universities struggle to make savings in an increasingly monetised and competitive environment, they grasp opportunities to scale back, or discontinue, ‘non-profitable’ activities. The departure of a staff member through retirement or similar offers an opportunity to re-evaluate salary costs; temporary contracts are often not renewed; casual staff is not incentivised to drive up student recruitment. What may appear to be a necessary business choice at institutional level, has led to a sharp decrease in the UK-wide provision of Dutch Studies.

The absence of a national directive on languages means that individual universities will take individual decisions and feel no responsibility for the bigger picture. It appears that the conclusion of the 2005 study ‘The National Languages Strategy in Higher Education’ still applies today: “Unless the unexplained diminution in provision is publicly explained as a matter of national strategic concern, university managers are likely to continue to deal with the consequences of subject decline in purely institutional terms.”

We are losing the academic infrastructure that is necessary to equip our young people right across the UK with the language skills and cultural breadth they will need if they are to be confident citizens of a global world.

Professor Katrin Kohl, University of Oxford

4.5 DISCONTINUED PROGRAMMES

The absence of a national policy to protect languages of strategic importance has led to an imbalance in national need and national provision. Dutch is a case in point here. It is identified as the seventh most significant language for a post-Brexit UK, yet its provision is declining at an alarming rate. The opportunities to study Dutch as an undergraduate student in the UK in 2017 are on a par with Korean, yet Korean occupies position 21 in the list of significant languages for a post-Brexit UK. Portuguese, Japanese and Russian occupy position eight, nine and ten in the British Council table of significant languages for a global UK. Yet, in 2017, in the UK, provision for Portuguese and Japanese (both 27th position) exceeded the number of HE institutions that offer Dutch by a factor of nine.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Faced with a continuing general decline in the study of modern languages, we call for a strategic protected languages of particular importance that should have a proven interest in Dutch, such as Newcastle, Nottingham, and Cambridge, or a thriving IWLP in Dutch, such as Manchester and Edinburgh.

- Reintroduce Dutch Studies as part of a language degree programme in at least one HE Institution on the island of Ireland.

14 From Pieter Gey (1919–1923) and Peter Haring (1923–1925) to Jacob Haantjes (1925–1931), Theodoor Wevers (1931–1971), Ren Meijers (1971–1993) and Theo Hermans, Reinier Salverda, and Jane Fenouillet, to name but the full professors.

15 Dutch Crossing is listed in all leading journal ranking lists and citation indexes (e.g. Thomson Reuters’ SJR Web of Knowledge, Elsevier, European Reference Index for the Humanities etc.)

16 Situation in 2006: 2.0 professors, 1.0 senior lecturer, 2.0 lecturers.

17 I am obviously absolutely appalled that the university does not value the Dutch department as much as myself and my fellow students, particularly for a university that prides itself on its internationalism. The fact that the Dutch programme will no longer be offered will deter future students.


19 ‘Modern Languages in the UK – all change after the EU Referendum?’, Oxford University News and Event (online source) 13 October 2016.


Languages for the Future, p. 54.
Enquiry-based teaching alongside the increasing marketisation of the HE sector has put the student experience centre stage, particularly in England. For this survey we approached students currently studying Dutch as a Major or Minor language within a BA Programme as well as students on IWLP Dutch courses. In total, 67 students from eight institutions filled in our questionnaire. The majority were on BA Language programmes. Below we will discuss ‘Language Degree students’ and the IWLP students separately.

5.1 DUTCH AS A MAJOR COMPONENT WITHIN A BA MODERN LANGUAGES
From the response to our survey we identified a 37% drop in student numbers over the last ten years. This is a similar percentage to the drop in student numbers we have seen in German over the past decade. All European languages (even relatively good performers such as Spanish) have suffered a significant decrease in student numbers. 50% of our staff respondents who indicated that student numbers have dropped over the last five years quoted the “general decline in specialised language and literature degrees” as the most significant contributing factor in that decline.

In spite of the steep reduction in student numbers, our survey found that student respondents were overwhelmingly positive about their Dutch programme. Even if we take into account that an enthusiastic student is more likely to respond than a less keen one, the overall impression is one of great engagement with both the language and the culture.

Our survey asked why respondents decided to study Dutch. 45 of the 67 student responses came from students studying Dutch within an academic department. “Wanting to learn the language” is the reason given most frequently, and many expressed explicitly that it was the languages aspect of their programme that they enjoyed the most. In many cases, respondents cited enjoying visits to the Netherlands and enjoying the company of Dutch and Flemish people.

The second most important reason is the students’ interest in the culture of the Low Countries and am learning Dutch in order to visit and possibly study there in the future.
Undergraduate Student, University of York

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Q8 Please tell us what you enjoy most about studying Dutch/Low Countries Studies?
Responses by student’s named degree or as part of a language department

The second most important reason is the students’ interest in the culture of the Low Countries. However, the survey identified a widely held perception that language and culture are separate activities that can be studied independently of one another. This is possibly the result of a wider academic trend away from national culture.
WILLIAM F. ELLERICK, ALCS PLEDGES TO SUPPORT DUTCH STUDIES

The number of Dutch students and staff in the UK has increased in recent years, but a survey has found that the subject is still underrepresented.

DISCUSSION

What I enjoy most about studying Dutch are my Career Prospects (large number of international legal institutions in the Netherlands). Undergraduate Student, University of Oxford

Dutch gives me something unique and niche; it opens up great networking opportunities. Undergraduate Student, The University of Sheffield

I am considering moving to the Netherlands and working for a Dutch company. Undergraduate Student, University College London

In our survey we also asked IWLP students about their motivation to study Dutch. 22 of the 67 student responses came from students studying Dutch within an IWLP. We noted relatively little difference in the motivation of IWLP and Language Degree students. IWLP respondents are also predominantly motivated by the desire to learn the language and often quote personal reasons, for example, because they want to communicate with Dutch-speaking relatives or raise children bilingually. An interest in Dutch and Flemish culture and plans for emigration were also mentioned. A slightly lower number of students noted that they were looking to move to the Low Countries for study or work purposes. Like the Degree respondents, IWLP students do not see Dutch as a career boosting choice. We were unable to obtain information regarding the impact of IWLP course participation on subsequent career development.

22 At Oxford University Dutch for Beginners is offered in the Faculty of Law. 23 UCML-AULC Survey of Institution-Wide Language Provision, p. 4.

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Dutch gives me something unique and niche; it opens up great networking opportunities. Undergraduate Student, The University of Sheffield

I am considering moving to the Netherlands and working for a Dutch company. Undergraduate Student, University College London

In our survey we also asked IWLP students about their motivation to study Dutch. 22 of the 67 student responses came from students studying Dutch within an IWLP. We noted relatively little difference in the motivation of IWLP and Language Degree students. IWLP respondents are also predominantly motivated by the desire to learn the language and often quote personal reasons, for example, because they want to communicate with Dutch-speaking relatives or raise children bilingually. An interest in Dutch and Flemish culture and plans for emigration were also mentioned. A slightly lower number of students noted that they were looking to move to the Low Countries for study or work purposes. Like the Degree respondents, IWLP students do not see Dutch as a career boosting choice. We were unable to obtain information regarding the impact of IWLP course participation on subsequent career development.

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6. Staffing and Research

We collected the data of staff from nine institutions: six in England and one each in Ireland, Scotland and Wales.

6.1 STAFF

Our findings confirm that the decline in designated members of staff for Dutch Studies flagged up in the 2006 survey has continued. We calculate the drop at around 20%. In 2006 approximately 40% of all staff were permanent academics, this has now dropped to 32% of remaining staff. Dutch Studies in the UK draws heavily on fixed term and/or part-time members of staff for delivering the language programme. There are few possibilities for early career researchers to gain teaching experience.

Similar to the 2006 survey we note a striking lack of native speakers of English among the permanent academic staff. Compared with the ‘bigger’ modern languages, the balance of target language and home language speakers within academic departments across the country is in many cases not achieved. In turn, this means that students have little exposure to native speakers of English who have a high proficiency of Dutch and who personally demonstrate that a choice for Dutch Studies within academia is a viable one. Our most recent PhD graduates have either moved abroad, or moved into a different line of academic disciplines, such as Germanic Studies, English, Music, the Creative Arts for example. Research activity with a Low Countries Studies slant is therefore likely to be considerably more intensive, but this does not yet translate into an increased number of researchers or staff in the field.

6.2 RESEARCH

Our survey has identified nine active researchers within Low Countries Studies in 2017 (this number excludes historians and art historians), this means a loss of approximately twenty researchers from the field over the last ten years. This drastic reduction from an already small pool means that there is a serious danger of losing the critical mass necessary to survive in a competitive academic climate.

It is important, however, to put this data into context. Our questionnaire has not delved into the broad area of Low Countries experts within History or Art History, nor have we reached colleagues that work on Low Countries topics within other disciplines, such as Germanic Studies, English, Music, the Creative Arts for example. Research activity with a Low Countries Studies slant is therefore likely to be considerably more intensive, but this often takes place within a discipline that does not identify with the Dutch Studies or Low Countries Studies label. This also applies for typically cross-language areas such as linguistics. The lack of identification with Dutch Studies is in line with a trend in modern languages to identify with a transnational frame away from labels that are associated with a particular nation or region.

The 2006 survey sets the tone for our conclusion: even at the University of Sheffield and University College London research within the field is largely dependent on the efforts of a few individuals within those institutions. There is, however, early evidence of a developing coherent anglophone Dutch Studies in the UK: there is a broad world wide interest in Dutch Studies which the ALCS manages to capture and represent in our scholarly journal Dutch Crossing: Journal of Low Countries Studies. This is the only broad A listed academic journal in Dutch Studies that finds a worldwide audience. The same applies to the ALCS Postgraduate and Early Career Symposium and the biennial ALCS International Conferences. For the Sheffield edition in 2018 we welcomed delegates from four continents, underscoring the global appeal of anglophone Dutch Studies.

In the global field of Dutch Studies, the UK and Ireland play an important role. The strength of the research in history, art history, literature, language and culture; the many contemporary and historical ties; the geographical proximity; all this puts our region in the position to play a leading role in anglophone world of Dutch Studies. However, without a clear anchor within the academic world, without specialist students on undergraduate and postgraduate programmes, without prospect for our early career researchers, the UK will lose that position and with that the teachers and researchers of the future.

The time to act is now.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

• Support the re-institution of at least one named Chair of Dutch Studies in the UK.
• Strengthen the field of anglophone Dutch Studies by seeking alliances and collaborations with international colleagues, particularly in the US.
• Ensure that the journal Dutch Crossing: Journal of Low Countries Studies remains a high profile publication and consider Open Access as a way to broaden the journal’s reach and impact even further.
• Seek alliances and connections through interdisciplinary and cross-national research and maintain a presence in the increasingly important field of translation studies.
• Develop bi- or multilateral relationships with universities in the Netherlands and Flanders in order to develop research collaborations and postgraduate opportunities.

24 Unfortunately it is impossible to be more accurate here. There is great variation in positions, types of contract and occasional staffing.
25 These numbers include the data we have received for IWLP.

6.3 CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, there is a serious danger of losing the critical mass necessary to survive in a competitive academic climate. It is important, however, to put this data into context. Our questionnaire has not delved into the broad area of Low Countries experts within History or Art History, nor have we reached colleagues that work on Low Countries topics within other disciplines, such as Germanic Studies, English, Music, the Creative Arts for example. Research activity with a Low Countries Studies slant is therefore likely to be considerably more intensive, but this often takes place within a discipline that does not identify with the Dutch Studies or Low Countries Studies label. This also applies for typically cross-language areas such as linguistics. The lack of identification with Dutch Studies is in line with a trend in modern languages to identify with a transnational frame away from labels that are associated with a particular nation or region.

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6.4 FURTHER RESEARCH

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The State of Dutch Studies in the UK and Ireland

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