

Issue 1
15 October 2025

Update from UCGAL

*Notes from the latest
meeting of the
University Council for
General and Applied
Linguistics*

A summary of discussions at the latest committee meeting. Please share with member organisations and other interested parties.

Attending

Present: Billy Clark (Chair, President), Laura Bailey (Secretary), Jonathan Kasstan (Treasurer and Association for French Language Studies), Emma Humphries (Henry Sweet Society), Kristine Horner (Forum for Germanic Language Studies), Pawel Szudarski (British Association for Applied Linguistics), Lutz Marten (Philological Society), Zoe Boughton (Association for French Language Studies), Jim Scobbie (British Association of Academic Phoneticians)

Reports from member organisations

Organisations range in size and formality from a loose collective with no membership dues to a large organization with many members overseen by the Charities Commission. These situations present different organisational and administrative challenges. In particular, the modern languages societies feel under pressure in the UK at present (and are strengthening connections internationally as a result) due to cuts to departments and members frequently being the lone linguist in a languages department.

Many organisations have recently had successful conferences or annual meetings, such as the French Language Studies conference in Brussels (where they also welcomed four new committee members including new President Robert Blackwood from the University of Liverpool) and the British Association for Applied Linguistics conference in Glasgow. The British Association of Academic Phoneticians (BAAP) has its biennial conference coming up in April 2026 in Warwick. The Henry Sweet Society is also about to award its essay prize and travel grant, so keep an eye out for that news.

What is UCGAL and what should it be?

We welcomed our new President, Billy Clark (Northumbria University) who takes over from Lesley Jeffries. Billy opened a discussion about the future of UCGAL including what we should do, what we represent, and how we can continue to make linguistics more prominent in the UK.

Billy suggested a name change to something simple and clear like the Linguistics Council, on the grounds that it will be less likely to be abbreviated and so the word

‘linguistics’ will be more salient when we are mentioned. There was some agreement on this, and also some suggestion we might like to keep the term ‘university council’ in parallel with other organisations. To be discussed further, and input welcome. It was agreed that this change should be publicized with some substantial content, to make clear what our aims are.

There was discussion about our role as an organization, which is not to do the same things as other organisations but to highlight what they do and raise the profile of linguistics. We discussed a number of initiatives including events, updating the website, and producing the newsletter that you’re reading now. There was also agreement that we need to be in conversation with decision-makers and those deciding policy.

Next steps

We will hold another committee meeting sooner than usual, in a few weeks’ time, to pick up on some of these discussions. If you’d like to feed into them, please contact your organisation’s representative on the committee or the Chair of UCGAL.

Member organisations

Association for French Language Studies <https://afls.net/>

British Association for Applied Linguistics www.baal.org.uk/

British Association of Academic Phoneticians www.baap.ac.uk/

British Association for Clinical Linguists www.bacl.info/

Forum for Germanic Language Studies www.fgls.ac.uk/

Henry Sweet Society www.henrysweet.org/

Linguistics Association of Great Britain www.lagb.org.uk/

Philological Society www.philsoc.org.uk/

Poetics and Linguistics Association www.pala.ac.uk/

UK Cognitive Linguistics Association www.uk-cla.org.uk/

University Council for Languages <https://university-council-for-languages.org/>

Administrative roles

Chair: Prof. Billy Clark, Northumbria University (2025–2028)

Secretary: Dr Laura Bailey, University of Kent (2022–2025, 2025–)

Treasurer: Dr Jonathan Kasstan, University of Westminster (2021–2024, 2024–)