Upcoming

If you would like your conference or day school listed in *CCUE News* please send information regarding the event to Dr Christopher Ringrose, Divisional Leader, English Studies, University College Northampton, Moulton Park, Northampton, NN2 7AL (Fax 01604 720636; email: chris.ringrose@northampton.ac.uk

autobiografictions
8-10 September 2003.
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Deadline for submission of paper proposals 30 May 2003

Across the Great Divide
18-21 July 2003
All aspects of literary, theoretical, and material transatlantic cultural exchange between the British Isles and the Americas
Contact: Elisabeth Dodds
University of Edinburgh
21 George Square
Edinburgh EH8 9LD
e-mail: elisabethdodds@star-project.org
information online at www.star.ac.uk

Hysterical Fictions: Women, History and Authorship
5-7 August 2003
Gregynog Conference Centre
Contact: Ann Heilmann
Hysterical Fictions Conference
Keir Hardie Building
University of Wales, Swansea
Singleton Park
Swansea SA2 8PP
Email: a.b.heilmann@swansea.ac.uk

Father Figures: Gender and Paternity in the Modern Age
30 June -2 July 2003
Liverpool John Moores University.
Contact: Trev Broughton
Centre for Women's Studies
University of York
jlb2@york.ac.uk
or Helen Rogers
Literature and Cultural History
Liverpool John Moores University
h.rogers@livjm.ac.uk

Inside the Whale:
The Postcolonial and Globalisation
11-13 July 2003
University College Northampton
Contact: Dr Janet Wilson
Reader in English
University College Northampton
Moulton Park
Northampton NN2 7AL
Email: janet.wilson@northampton.ac.uk

The First British Shakespeare Association Conference
29-31 August 2003
De Montfort University

'Shakespeare and Cultural Exchange'
Philippa Berry and John J. Joughin
Contact: pjb1005@cam.ac.uk
jjoughin@uclan.ac.uk

'Shakespeare and Jealousy'
Contact: jbriggs@dmu.ac.uk

'Shakespeare and Performance'
Judith Buchanan
Contact: jrb7@york.ac.uk

'Shakespeare and Poetry'
Dympna Callaghan
Contact: dccallag@syr.edu

'Shakespeare and the Institution'
Deborah Cartmell
Contact: djc@dmu.ac.uk

'Shakespearean Childhoods'
Contact: Kate.Chedgzoy@newcastle.ac.uk

'Shakespeare in Theory'
John Drakakis and Adrian Streete
Contact: john.drakakis@stir.ac.uk

'Shakespeare, Theory and Spirituality'
Contact: E.F.Fernie@qub.ac.uk

'Shakespeare and Change'
Contact: L.M.Hopkins@shu.ac.uk

'Acting Up in the Classroom'
Contact: C.Rutter@warwick.ac.uk

'Re-viewing Shakespeare Reviewing'
Peter J. Smith and Paul Prescott
Contact: peter.smith@ntu.ac.uk

'Shakespeare and Translation'
Nigel Wood
Contact: n.p.wood@lboro.ac.uk

'Not Just Shakespeare'
Contact: p.womack@uea.ac.uk

To register for the conference follow the link provided on the BSA website at: www.britishshakespeare.ws

Spring 2003 Issue 17

CCUE NEWS

COUNCIL *for* COLLEGE *and* UNIVERSITY ENGLISH

Continuous Improvement?

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Editorial

It is going to be a busy summer. QAA Subject Review is in its 'transitional period' (2002-5), but in a sense it always was. Developmental Engagements test the strength of internal review procedures but also help institutions prepare for audit. We have 'inclusion' (some of us more than others), personal development planning, modernised criteria for Access courses, round table meetings on external examining and programme specifications, a new Director for the English Subject Centre (Ben Knights), the likelihood of the AHRB becoming the AHRC, second stage consultation on the future of the RAE, and formal consultation stage on the 'Lewinski' Report on Improving Standards in Graduate Research. It's good that CCUE is involved in an advisory capacity all of these initiatives, but as one development follows another it becomes harder to balance the notion of 'continuous improvement' with the current crisis in university funding.

This issue of *CCUE News* looks at a number of such initiatives, from the perspective of the English HE community. In an extensive interview, Peter Williams, the Chief Executive of the QAA and an English graduate himself, talks openly and reflectively about the Agency's new statement on its purposes, values and standards, and about the desire to both challenge and work in partnership with the academic community. Professor Geoffrey Crossick, the Chief Executive of the Arts & Humanities Research Board, writes on the AHRB and the Future of Research in English. Andrea Rayner, and a number of ILT Teaching Fellowship holders who happen to be Lecturers in English, reflect on the work being done by and through the Institute for Learning and Teaching. The fourth strand consists of a pair of articles by Siobhán Holland and Ian McCormick strongly defending the opportunities offered by the Widening Participation Agenda.

The September 2003 Issue of *CCUE News* has a transatlantic theme; it will look at the relations between University English in the USA and the UK—students, curricula, exchanges, expatriates . . . even Government initiatives. All contributions by August 31st 2003 please, to the address below:

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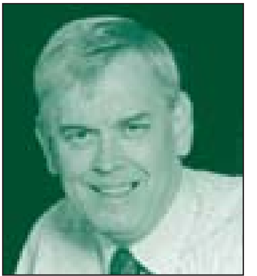
Interview: Peter Williams, Chief Executive of QAA



Talks with Lyn Pykett (University of Aberystwyth) ***and Chris Ringrose*** (University College Northampton)

This interview took place shortly before the publication of the QAA's Strategic Plan 2003-5 and at the end of a day on which one of the interviewers had undergone training for a subject level developmental engagement. The interview, the training day and the Strategic Plan all indicate significant changes of emphasis in the approach of the QAA. First, the training package was succinct, to the point and worked from the assumption (underlined by Peter Williams in his interview) that HE Schools and Departments were likely to be doing their best and, on the whole doing things well, and that in most cases a subject level engagement visit would confirm the presence of quality and result in an expression of confidence in standards. Since there is now an emphasis on 'enhancement' rather than inspection, there is an expectation that such visits should also result in constructive engagement with ways of improving the student experience. They should also provide greater clarity of information, including a clearer articulation of outcomes and standards. As readers will note below, Peter Williams also emphasises the importance of clarity of information for students and other 'stakeholders'. He stresses the centrality of the QAA's Academic Infrastructure as the key 'reference point' in the review process and as the 'informing structure .. for higher education', but his rhetoric is one of dialogue, partnership and engagement, rather than of prescription and inspection. Perhaps most surprising is Peter Williams's own willingness to engage with the issue of the values of higher education and to enter a field of debate which he implies has been abandoned by others whose concern it ought to be. The QAA's recently published Strategic Plan also takes up the moral high ground in its articulation of the Agency's mission (quoted by Peter Williams in the course of the interview) and in its ambition to be seen 'to have an effective voice, on behalf of UK higher education, on the European and international scene'. In all of these respects – its Europeanism and internationalism, and its willingness to engage in debate about the multiple purposes and results of HE, its values and value, its relationship with the state and society – the QAA's Strategic Plan boldly goes where the DfE's White Paper on the future on higher education fears to tread. If the QAA is genuine about wanting to open up a space for debate, we should take up the challenge.

CCUE: You are yourself an English graduate. Which of the qualities that we value in English and English graduates contribute to the fulfilment of your role as Chief Executive of QAA?

PW: That is a very interesting question and is one that's really quite difficult to answer. Certainly when I was an undergraduate, I had no idea what the 'qualities' of an English graduate were or were meant to be – they were never mentioned.

CCUE: But now you'd find them in a benchmark statement?

PW: Well, the English benchmark statement tells us that 'the study of English develops a flexible and responsive openness of mind, conceptual sophistication in argument and the ability to engage in dialogue with past and present cultures and values'. It goes on: 'it also has a special role in sustaining, in the general community, a constantly renewed knowledge and critical appreciation of the literature of the past and of other cultural forms'. I would say that those are exactly the sort of qualities that I need and would hope to bring to this job.

CCUE: Interestingly, you took your own degree a number of years ago . . .

PW: Many years ago!

CCUE: . . . and those are the qualities that we might have noted 30 years ago when we got our degrees. But there are now many other things that it is necessary to articulate about being an English graduate.

PW: Yes, and I agree with you that their articulation is necessary. I would go further and say that it is also necessary for me to bring to this job a flexible responsiveness. It would be very hard to say quite how and why and where and when my university education gave me that, but I certainly would argue that that is what is needed. And I do believe, in retrospect, that through English I learned values that have held me in good stead.

CCUE: English is also concerned with critical thinking and sensitivity to language, and you are undoubtedly aware that many of our English Studies colleagues feel that a lot of the documents that come out of bodies like the QAA are written in a curious 'bureaucratese'.

PW: Certainly, we try not to write like that. But I know what you mean because, reading the English benchmark statement, it struck me as being full of the jargon of English studies, which can also be rather impenetrable at times. We all use the jargons of our work, either deliberately or inadvertently. The difficulty is, of course, that when you are dealing with complex ideas, which are not necessarily familiar to those people with whom you are trying to engage, you have still "gotta use words" as Eliot put it. Words are our stock in trade, ultimately all we have to offer, and of course it is easy to forget the needs of the reader. So one of the things we are trying to do now is to identify the audiences for the documents that we are producing, and to write our reports in a style that meets their particular needs. In the reports that we are going to be producing for our new institutional

audits, we have identified three audiences—so we are going to have to write in three different registers.

CCUE: Some colleagues might say that this is a language that we have learned and there is a curious dance that we perform when we talk to you.

> ***"everyone is frightened to say 'boo' to any goose, in case they are penalised for not conforming . . . they tell us what they think we want to hear . . . that's not very impressive"***

PW: Yes, but I think one has to be very careful to distinguish between the different strands of external quality assurance that have contributed to the work of QAA and its predecessors, and the influences these different approaches have had in this matter of language and dance. The subject review/TQA approach ultimately went back to the schools inspection tradition, which adopted a very particular style and attitude, and of course the trouble with Inspectorates is that they are, by definition, always right. Even when they're wrong. Whereas what we are now doing is something rather different. The trouble is that we took over the rhetoric of inspection for a particular process, which was not originally intended to be inspection, but which, I think, ended up actually being inspection just because of the way it was done and the language that was used. But what you say about academics' use of QAA's jargon worries me on two grounds. The first is the implied unwillingness of academics to talk to us in plain English. We do welcome and understand it, you know. The second is that if they think the way to play the game is by telling us what we want to hear, or what they think we ought to hear, in our own peculiar language, then of course that is merely playing games. That is not what we want at all. We want them to tell us in their own words what they do, how they do it, why they do it, why they think that is the best way of doing it and how they know it works. These are fairly straightforward questions, though I know they aren't easy to answer. But the answers are more likely to be convincing if they are given in the language of the questioned, not of the questioner. The questions we have asked in audit, the other strand of our work, have always tried to engage people on their own terms. The difficulty is that very often they haven't had any terms of their own with which to engage us, perhaps because they don't talk much about quality and standards amongst themselves, and it is only when we start asking the questions that the forms of speech are provided with which they can start to answer them. So there are actually some rather difficult linguistic problems with this whole activity. And we shouldn't forget that we are not dealing with simple concepts.

CCUE: The tone of QAA Assessor training, is that 'it is not about us [QAA] doing it to them but a matter of partnership and dialogue'. That is heartening, but when we move to modes of reporting, especially in relation to Developmental Engagement, everything has to be articulated in terms of the Academic Infrastructure.

PW: The Academic Infrastructure can be described roughly as a set of objective correlatives. We use the term 'reference points' when we speak about it, and it's useful to have a common set of terms to describe the way that higher education in the UK is structured and works because it will help us all to understand better what we are doing. The Academic Infrastructure now provides the organising principle which underpins higher education here. It hasn't yet, I think, quite dawned fully on everyone that that is so, or what it means.

The idea of the Infrastructure emerged principally from the Dearing agenda. It is an attempt to make the organisation of higher education understandable. It tries to describe what the general levels of tertiary educational qualifications mean, and how they are related to each other. The Qualifications Frameworks, with their 'descriptors', are intended to do this. They talk about what an honours degree is, what a master's degree and doctorate are, and so on. Then it describes, through the subject benchmark statements, how individual subjects relate to those qualification descriptors. The third bit of the Infrastructure is the programme specification, which, so far as I'm concerned, is the centre of it all. The programme specification describes the deal that's on offer to students studying a particular programme or course, and as such tells them not only what they will get by way of syllabus content, teaching, learning resources and methods of assessment, but also how their programme relates to the general national expectations for the qualification they are trying to get – which is what the rest of the Academic Infrastructure describes. So a student doing a degree in English in Northampton, and a student doing one in Aberystwyth, can have some confidence and knowledge that there is comparability between the academic standards of the two degrees, and yet can understand that differences and diversity between them are not necessarily a problem. If they both come away with a 2:1 in English they (and their parents!) need to be reassured about the 'currency value' of their degrees, that they are worth something and have credibility in the job market in which they will be competing. It's the existence of the external reference points of the Academic Infrastructure that will allow this.

Information about programmes, degrees and other qualifications is also important for another reason, I believe. The rise of vocational programmes and the Government's emphasis on the centrality of the economic benefit of higher education has in recent years created quite a tension between higher education as primarily the source of advanced qualifications and credentials - the utilitarian approach, if you like - and higher education as what you might loosely describe as personal developmental and transformational experience (i.e. education as the word was traditionally understood). Whatever you do in higher education leads to a qualification these days, but the route you tread to that qualification may or may not give you all kinds of other things as well. In most of the humanities subjects, the personal development aspects of study are, I believe, central to its purpose. In a sense the process is part of the outcome – the medium is the message. But if you are studying to meet a narrower purpose, simply to get a credential to further your career, for example, you may just be looking

for advanced specialist training, in which knowing things for the exam, acquiring particular competencies, and doing so as quickly as possible, may actually be what's most important to you. The only physical thing you get out of either type of study is the certificate, so I think it is necessary to make it clear to potential students what the object of the exercise is — and for that there has to be some sort of national framework within which the qualifications can be related. Then, of course, precisely how you achieve the purposes of the course or programme is up to the individuals concerned.

CCUE: When you talk about the 'currency value' of a 2.1 in English, are we talking about the differential value between degrees from different universities? That is what the term 'currency value' seems to mean and a student may say 'I'm not going to invest in this'.

PW: Let's talk in terms of an assay office instead of a currency value. If you go to an assay office and you have a ring assayed you will be told whether it's nine carat gold, 18 carat gold or 21 carat gold (or even 22 or 24); that tells you how much gold bullion value there is in it, but it doesn't tell you how useful it's going to be. What we need to do is to make clear to students the assay value of the degree that they are getting, because all the values are valuable. That is to say, nine carat gold may not have as much bullion in it but it is actually rather hard wearing. 18 carat gold is very beautiful, but it is soft and you can only use it for decorative purposes, and so on. So what we really need to know is – "What am I going to get if I spend three years doing a degree in English?" (a) what am I going to do while I'm there? (b) what kind of experience is it actually going to be? and (c) when that happy three years studying English comes to an end - then what? The 'then what?' begins to loom larger and larger as I go through my course. Certainly in the world that we live in now, where the government seems to be taking an increasingly instrumental and mechanistic view of higher education, and students will leave owing a small fortune, the 'then what?' is going to loom really quite large. The balance has to be struck between higher education as a provider of a qualification and as an experience which is valuable for its own sake.

CCUE: What about institutional audit?

PW: Audit was never an inspection model. Audit has always been a question of asking institutions how they do things, and how they know they are doing them well, not saying that they must do them this way or that way. When you look at the overall judgement which will be coming out of institutional audit, it is not a judgement 'this is good, this is bad', 'this passes, this fails', it's a judgement of the Agency's confidence, and that is decided by peers from within the higher education community. I think we are here in large measure to help students and give them (or indeed anybody else who needs to use higher education or who comes into contact with it) the basis for making rational judgements and decisions based on sound information. Part of the information we provide comes through our enquiries and our judgements of that confidence and part of the information is that which the universities themselves will actually be providing about their quality and standards. But ultimately it all goes back to institutions being responsible to themselves for their work. QAA is not responsible for the universities' own quality and standards.

CCUE: Would QAA assume programme specifications to be the central point of definition for students?

PW: A principal audience for programme specifications should be students; in a sense it should form the centre of the compact between the university and the student. 'This is what we are doing, how we are doing it and why we are doing it. This is what you will get if you come here.' The students should be fully aware of what that means in terms of their responsibilities but at the same time should receive what they have been told they would receive. So I think it is part of a compact; others might call it a contract: but that has a legal connotation which might well be valid but which I wouldn't want to pursue in this conversation.

CCUE: QAA is more insistent that students be involved in the preparation for visits, by being directly involved in self evaluation, and producing their own written submissions. On the other hand, there is a decided focus on Academic Infrastructures, which on the whole isn't how students perceive their courses, or what they are interested in. This makes the Developmental Engagement process quite complex.

> ***"Being self-critical is part of being professional"***

PW: Yes, Developmental Engagements are complex but that's partly because they are trying to meet different interests. The interests are compatible but have to be looked at in different ways. We have the public interest that UK qualifications should be of a reasonable and, we would argue, explicit standard. Then there should be adequate means of helping students to achieve that standard: that is the quality aspect of it—the quality of the learning opportunities. All that relates to what we were talking about earlier: the currency standards, the qualifications frameworks, the relationships to the programmes via the subject benchmark statements. The students aren't going to be worrying about the qualifications framework; they trust that they are coming to a well-ordered system which knows what it is doing and does what it says. There is no reason why they should necessarily be interested in the framework, but it is the framework that makes it possible to deliver what they're looking for and trusting in. A few months ago we produced a series of leaflets for students to explain to them what programme specifications are and how they might use them. These have been a great success. But students' interests are very personal. Whatever else you offer them, they do want to come out with a degree which is worth having. That is the part of the student interest we want to be sure is being safeguarded. We think universities themselves should be doing that. That's why we have moved away from the idea that we are responsible for the quality or standards for individual programmes – that is for the university. Not only is it a responsibility for them but it is also a key part of their autonomy - again one of the things that we wish to protect. I think we are actually in the business of protecting, rather more fiercely than any other organisation at the moment, the autonomy of institutions.

You won't have seen this yet, but we are just producing our new Strategic Plan and one of the things we have put in this plan is a statement of our values, because I think that one of the things that is missing from higher education these days is actually a set of commonly held values. So we have gone out on a limb and we have put in some values - what we think the value of higher education is, for example - and I should like to think we are throwing down a

gauntlet to the universities. This is what we believe: "The Agency values knowledge, intellectual challenge, imagination, discovery and achievement in higher education. It respects the constitutional, intellectual and operational autonomy of higher education providers and the diversity of institutional mission within the different legislative contexts across the UK. It acknowledges the academic calling, and the importance of higher education and the personal, professional and economic lives of citizens, individually and collectively". We are there laying out our values— what I think actually are the core humane values of higher education—and in a way I hope this will be an antidote to those who see it solely in terms of filling up little vessels with knowledge on a brisk production line. Higher education goes beyond that and I think that someone has got to make a stand for the broader purpose: I haven't seen that stand being made very effectively anywhere in the last few years. I really do believe that there has been something of a *trahison des clercs* over the last 15 -20 years and I think I know why. It's because everyone is frightened to say 'boo' to any goose, in case they are penalised for not conforming. That, again, is why they tell us what they think we want to hear and, bearing in mind the principles I have just rehearsed, that's not very impressive. It doesn't sound as if we have got a strong independent, fearless higher education system, prepared to defend its values and its autonomy!

CCUE: Universities are always enjoined by QAA to be forthright and self-critical in their self-evaluations. Can you understand why some have come to regard that injunction with suspicion?

PW: Yes, but they really can't afford not to be self-critical. So far as I am concerned being self-critical is part of being professional. As you imply, at the beginning there were some very unfortunate experiences. In 1993, in some of the very early TQAs, I understand that institutions were invited to be self-critical and then when they were self-critical that was held against them. It was used by the assessors as a way of finding out things that were 'wrong' on a sort of 'gotcha' principle and that I think meant that a lot of institutions were wary, quite understandably, of actually being candid to us later on. The consequences of candour in an institution should be positive rather than negative. So if an institution says we know we are not very good in this area but we are doing something about it, they should be praised. But if they say we know that we are weak in this area and are not doing anything about it, then they should not be praised. Diagnosis is one thing but then you have to do something about it - treat the problem. So I think there are ways in which I think some of our predecessor bodies have not been very helpful in encouraging that sense of self-criticism. That is unfortunate.

CCUE: Is there still a tension between 'development' and 'assessment'?

PW: Developmental Engagements were finally agreed on the basis that they would not be seen as confrontational. There would be one member of the team from the institution itself, and our reports wouldn't be published. We are now trying to make them as inherently useful to institutions as possible so that they can learn new things and see different ways of doing things and find out about themselves. It is almost like having a mirror held up to you, with no adverse consequences if you're not the fairest of them all, which in theory ought to be rather helpful (if perhaps unwelcome). I know that these things aren't always perfect in practice, but at least the idea itself is meant to be helpful.

CCUE: But is it credible to pursue a stringent quality agenda, considering the present incapacitating crisis in university funding?

PW: I think there are two answers to that. On one level there must be a relationship between quality and money. I don't think there is necessarily a direct relationship between standards and money. I think the relationship between quality and money is about - what we can provide to students to help them learn. It may be people, it may be books, it may be computers, it may be time, it may be all kinds of things but there must be a direct relationship between that and money. With standards I don't see that. Standards are arbitrary, set at whatever level the responsible authority wishes to set them. The difficulty, having set your standards, is helping students achieve them. If you set very high standards and your intake has only limited capacity or is not well prepared, then your students have a lot further to travel, so you probably need more resources to allow them to make that journey in the time available. But if you are taking very highly qualified, highly motivated students then the quality cost might not be such a problem. So one needs to be convinced that people are making the most of the resources they have got. Saying 'we need more money' is persuasive only when you also say 'this is what we have done with the money we have already got and we need more to do even better'. It is a bit like the parable of the talents really; simply doing the minimum isn't good enough. You have to show that you have tried to do as much as you can and I have little doubt that people are trying to make the most of what they have got. But there isn't much point in the QAA standing up and saying 'higher education needs more money'— because nobody would listen to us. If we did that we would then be seen as just another bunch of tin-rattlers and our more serious, our unique messages wouldn't be listened to either. Everybody says 'we need more money', but we can say something more usefully about standards and quality.

CCUE: Underlying the previous question is also the idea that, despite the crisis in funding, the demanding staffing levels, and the amount of work we need to get through to help our students complete courses successfully, a large proportion of our time is devoted to demonstrating our own worth.

PW: Yes, you would rather have that time to do some teaching. I do accept that being reviewed creates a burden, but having said that, the fact is that nobody in the last ten years (with only one or two minor exceptions) has had a subject review more than once in mainstream subjects. While I wouldn't want to underplay the stressfulness and burden of reviews at the time, I do think that the broader perspective has to be taken. The people who really suffer from the burden of external quality assurance are surely the administrators. They are the people who actually have to manage and run the processes. But I do think that it is necessary that institutions should spend part of their time ruminating on what they are doing: reflecting on what they are providing, why they are providing it, how they are providing it, explaining it to others. I think there is a considerable value in doing so. I remember when I worked at the University of Leicester, one department did a brilliant piece of PR. They decided to offer an open afternoon to all the University's administration to explain what their research was about. Even now, I remember it, though it was years ago. We were impressed by the fact that they were willing to take the trouble to say 'it is important that our colleagues in the University know what we do'. And it didn't seem to do them much harm when the money was allocated! Now that seems to me to be a shining example of what I would like to see in universities, in respect of what is called in the States 'the new collegiality'. Too often, in recent years, collegiality has simply meant 'don't get in my way and I won't get in yours'. But actually if academics and administrators were to develop some kind of collegiality which amounted to mutual understanding, respect, support and a sense of mutual responsibility, the whole of the quality assurance objective would really become quite simple. That's just a personal utopian view, of course, but I should like to see it tried somewhere.

CCUE: Even under the new system, the pressure is on all subjects to be up to the mark. Administrative staff will be the people collating the documentation and interfacing with QAA, but there will be an awful lot of activity.

PW: Yes, but I think that activity of this sort will in due course become part of the normal concept of a professional approach to academic life. That is to say, if you see quality assurance as an inherent part of professionalism, then it's not going to be 'an add on'. But I think it's also fair to ask of all quality assurance activities 'is this worth doing?' and to stop it if there's no very obvious benefit. But in making such a judgement it's important to realise that we are now working in a higher education world which, over the last 30 years or so, has seen a radical move which is probably inexorable and which many people will regret. It's a move from the main object of higher education being to train novices for the academic priesthood, to perpetuate the species and produce the next generation of researchers, to one where the subject, the programme, is a way of providing students with an opportunity to obtain a useful qualification for use in the job market. Higher education has become a means to an end, not an end in itself and I think that that shift has accelerated in the last 15 years. Certainly it's not going more slowly. The White Paper suggests that in England it is being speeded up as a matter of policy. In the old days (if I can put it that way) we spoke about university education being focused on the subject, about undergraduate study being a preparation for research. This is what I experienced in the late 1960s. As a student I had no intention of going on to do research, but I still found myself having to answer questions or deal with topics which had no interest for me, simply because they were what a researcher would be expected to know. Swathes of literature that were really of little concern to me then. Although, having said that, I would be the first to acknowledge that there were certain adventitious benefits to that approach. If I hadn't looked at Mediaeval and Renaissance literature, which did not attract me then, I should probably never have found Boethius. Reading Boethius was one of the great revelations of my time at university and it wasn't even written in English! So there was a degree of serendipity, but in those days, yes, you did get most of the best people doing research, so you could concentrate on perpetuating the academic species. The people who didn't happen to follow that route nonetheless were guaranteed jobs and good careers, because there were so few graduates, and so nobody lost. But if you were to try to use the same model today, then there would be a lot of very disappointed students.

"The consequences of candour in an institution should be positive rather than negative"

CCUE: Disappointed because their education has promised them something they are not going to be able to do?

PW: Yes, exactly. I remember I was the editor of a literary magazine at university. In my very last editorial, which was right at the very end when we were leaving, I wrote that we had had a good time, read a lot of interesting books, had a lot of interesting conversations and we were now being left high and dry. Nobody wanted to know: they just said goodbye, nice to know you, here's the champagne, here's the strawberries, that's the end of it. Maybe it was a personal thing but I felt an extraordinary sense of being let down because the previous three years had provided a vibrant, exciting, intellectually stimulating world of activity, but then, suddenly, the shutters came down. What's next? Well, it's up to you. There seemed to be a very limited notion of what the preparation for the 'afterlife' was that they were offering to most students. So the game is changing—or has already changed, I would say.

CCUE: The game has changed, but the game of quality assurance and 'perpetual improvement' means that universities—and English Departments—are guilty until proved innocent.

PW: That is certainly not an intention of mine, but I can understand why Departments may feel that way. Again I will just give you a sentence out of our values. "We take as the starting point for our reviews the belief that providers wish and intend to do a good and professional job in meeting their responsibilities as guardians of their academic standards and quality." So we assume that you are doing a good job and what we want to do is to try and confirm that and if we can't confirm it, then say where we think the deficits are and encourage you to do something about it. I hope that there has been a cultural change, because I do profoundly believe that QA should not be seen as a threat but that it is about helping people to do a good job better. And if they are doing a good job better, then we want to tell the world about it because they should be rather proud of what they are doing.

I sometimes characterise QA as being a cure for insomnia. Not just because the words that we use may be sleep inducing but because if you assure the quality of your work you can go to bed and sleep easy at night knowing it's going to be all right in the morning. Because it's designed to be. And if anything should go wrong, there's a way to put it right.

CCUE: We were looking at your article in *Higher Quality* November 2002. You are debating the differences between assurance and enhancement and there is a passage that commits us all to continuous improvement—always trying to do things better. Which is on the one hand laudable, but on the other hand is a formula that means you will never go to bed and sleep easy.

PW: Because you have never done it?

CCUE: Because you have never done *with* it.

PW: Surely that is one of the things that a university education teaches you: you have never finished. You can always do better and one has a moral responsibility to do so I think: like the "banner with the strange device" of Longfellow's poem.

CCUE: "Excelsior" rather than *Waiting for Godot*? Can we really, both in the academic community and in the QAA, put our hand on our heart and say it's been a decade of achievement?

PW: I was asked that earlier today. A delegation from universities in the Balkans was visiting and one of the people said 'What is the cost benefit analysis?' I had to say that it is not an easy question to answer. Not because one wants to dodge it, but because the evidence base which will allow you to come up with a coherent answer is actually rather difficult to find. I think there are a number of answers one can give to this question. The one that's probably the most useful is that 15 years ago we had a system of, say, 15%-20% participation, perhaps it was a bit more, in higher education. We now have 35% -36% in England, more in Scotland and probably more in Wales and if people were just doing the same thing as they were doing 15 years ago we would have double the number of students and a system in complete chaos. Simply doing more of the same was, I think, unsustainable. Which means that people have had to learn to do things differently, and I would argue that the conscious care with which people now organise and run their programmes and their academic activity is at least in part the result of QAA and its predecessors expecting to see, if you like, a more planned approach to the management of higher education. If that's true, then I think I would say that it's all worthwhile because it means that a lot of students have had a much better experience of higher education than they otherwise would have done. There are other arguments, though, simpler arguments. One is that we have actually trained and used 3 to 4 thousand people as reviewers of one sort or another and we like to think, and there is some evidence to support the view, that they have actually gone back to their institutions and talked about what they have done, shared with colleagues and perhaps suggested some new ways of doing things. So there has been a seeding effect. The work that the Agency and its predecessors have done has been the cause of a number of similar effects. Now, whether you think those effects have been desirable or not is a different issue. I think on balance they have been and I don't think you could successfully run our intensive higher education system now, without the much more organised approach that we commonly encounter. The Agency's activities have certainly had a big impact internationally and our overseas audits are actually very important for the reputation of UK HE overseas. But having said that I have to admit that I think that we are running probably one of the most complex review processes ever seen in the world. Logistically the English audit scheme is incredibly difficult to run just because of these disciplinary trails we've been required to include. You don't need to be troubled with those in Wales!

CCUE: And are you convinced that an 'outcomes-based' approach is an adequate one for this complex process?

PW: Outcomes is a word that can be used in two ways. There is 'outcome' meaning simply what happens, what you come out with, the results, the consequences, the score, if you like. Then there are 'learning outcomes' which is a term within educational theory. I am reasonably content with the use of the word outcomes in its usual meaning of 'what people come out with'. I am less enthusiastic about deterministic notions of learning outcomes, which seem to imply that you can actually force people to come out with specific so called outcomes. I think it is perfectly reasonable to say 'this is what this course is about, and if you do A then we hope you'll be able to do B, C and D and that's the way it's going to be described'. And I think as a general framework within which to operate there is nothing untoward about that. If I am going to go and do a course in physics I want to know what it is you are trying to teach me to know, understand and be able to do, and the way I might be developed by that experience. But since we don't talk now so much about teaching as about learning, learning outcomes seems to me to be just another way of describing what you are trying to teach. So at that level, using that general definition, that common usage of the word, I don't have a problem. The popular view of outcomes, though, is that we are talking about this more deterministic approach. Dearing, of course, was the one who in his report really brought this to the fore for higher education and said there should be a statement on what the outcomes of higher education programmes should be. And we now have the subject benchmark statements, which can be seen as a way of elucidating generic outcomes. These were very contentious when they were first proposed, but in many cases they have now come to be seen as a very useful point of reference. The problem with the deterministic approach to learning outcomes is that it seems to suggest that all students are common clay. It's a sausage machine. You just put the right filter on and you get the sausages coming out in the right shape: but that's not what higher education is about at all. All learning and teaching is a personal interaction of some sort, in which you may be able to control your input but you can't control the process in the student and you can't control the output in the student.

CCUE: Though reading in English studies could seem an arcane mystery.

PW: Of course if you are running a novice/priest model then the priest has to appear to have some secret otherwise the novice sees right through him. So you have to have this mysterious thing that you offer to pass on by way of some rare and precious process of transmission. I think you need to be a bit more explicit about what it's all about these days, to make clear how what you are trying to help students to do is useful.

CCUE: Am I sensing that you don't subscribe to the theory that if you can't define a learning process you don't assess it as an outcome?

PW: Well you can create a self-referential definition of that sort, but I don't see any use for it. What are you achieving? The attraction of the 'outcome' is that it makes assessment a more 'scientific' activity, and it moves away from a connoisseur activity. English is one of the connoisseur judgement assessment systems par excellence, whereas a subject like physics is not. There are few right answers in English. So I think it's a matter of fitness for purpose. But I don't think the connoisseur approach in English assessment relieves those involved in it from being pretty clear about what they are trying to check, because assessment is a measurement job. What you measure and how you measure it may vary, but if you are assessing somebody, you are in some respect measuring them against something.

"We have actually trained and used 3 to 4 thousand people as reviewers"

CCUE: One of the keys is oral skills and most of us would argue that most modules in English seem to (cover or develop) oral skills. Some modules assess them. I have heard it said that 'you can't say that you are developing oral skills if you don't demonstrate how you assess'.

PW: It depends on how essential the development of oral skills is, either to what you think you are doing or to what the student is going to be assessed on. I doubt if it was a learning outcome when I was a student. I once sat in a seminar of 20 people and nobody was prepared to say a word. This difficult situation was managed brilliantly by the lecturer. He just sat there and didn't say a word either. After about five minutes of mounting embarrassment, somebody said something and then someone else threw in some reference to the work we were supposed to be looking at and out of a sheer sense of relief everybody pitched in and we had the most wonderful discussion. I'm not sure how the oral skills would have been assessed. But it's a high-risk strategy.

CCUE: How does QAA evaluate its own procedures, successes and shortcomings?

PW: I'd rather others did that, in a way. Our own evaluation of our work is necessary, and we have an extensive procedure for doing it, but it needs an external evaluation as well.

CCUE: Except that we are constantly reviewing modules by asking the students about them, and assessing and analysing their feedback.

PW: We do ask for feedback after reviews, via our questionnaire. Our work creates high levels of stress and asking people about it immediately afterwards is necessary but not ideal. I think emotion recollected in tranquillity is a much better approach. Look at it two years later and ask what was the outcome of all that? Was it worth doing or was it merely a boring old chore that we had to do? We do now have a more explicit strategy for enhancement and development through events and 'round tables' where practitioners come and talk to us and to each other about particular issues. These have been very successful so far. We have had a series on external examiners, we have had another series on programme specifications, and another series coming up on the code of practice. All these things are there as much for the benefit of institutions, for academics, as they are for us.

CCUE: Do such events reach the 'grass roots'?

PW: Well we do advertise; there are limited places but anyone is welcome to apply. One of our problems is that it is actually very difficult to get to the grass roots. They don't always want to talk to us! We can't, in any case, talk to everybody, so we have developed a new liaison system with institutions and I do hope that that we can engage with people at different levels through that. The other thing is, of course, that we talk to reviewers, not just in terms of the reviews they do but in more general conversation, and our reviewers are nearly all current academic practitioners.

CCUE: And there is, as we said earlier, an effort to involve students in the work of QAA. Some of them find the process difficult.

PW: There are lots of reasons for that, aren't there? One is that they feel uncertain about their role and authority. They want to do a good job but they don't know if they are fully representative, they don't know if they have got the skills, they don't know their capacity. The other thing is that they don't necessarily want to be seen to have been disloyal. They may think that if they are critical about their department or their university they are being disloyal. Alternatively, of course, they might conceivably just want to get their own back, for what they perceive to be unfair treatment or whatever. So it could be difficult, but it is also very valuable for another reason, which is it that it makes the students realise that they are actually stakeholders, what they say matters and that will help them, I hope, to recognise their responsibilities as well as their entitlements. It is also a useful way of meeting the argument of those who say 'you only get the university side of it'. So it's quite a useful opportunity to 'triangulate'. I should also say that so far the response of students to the challenge of participating in audits has been extraordinary. They are doing an outstanding job of providing this 'user perspective' in a responsible, constructive and enlightening way. There was, however, a famous occasion on an audit when students were meeting the team over lunch and one team member found himself sitting next to a woman and said to her 'How long have you been a student here?' and she said 'Only a couple of days.' 'That's interesting,' he said. 'how did you get chosen for this session?' and she replied 'Oh, I was just asked if I would come along and do it.' He then enquired 'What do you do?' 'I'm a part-time student.' 'What do you do for the rest of your time?' 'Oh, I'm the Vice Chancellor's Secretary.'

The AHRB and Research in English

Geoffrey Crossick
Chief Executive, Arts & Humanities Research Board

When I joined the Arts and Humanities Research Board last September I knew that it was an important period for arts and humanities in the UK. In my years as an academic I had never known the standing of our disciplines to be so high. It is never easy to explain the shifting fashion in these matters, but one can speculate about the reasons for the high public profile of the arts and humanities today. One must surely be the extensive television attention to our disciplines – especially history, art history and archaeology – which has often made explicit the research base on which these programmes have rested. Cultural institutions now receive an attention from both the public and government which is far greater than one would have found a decade or so ago. My programme of university visits in recent months has taken me to many of the cities which are competing to become European Capital of Culture, and I have been struck by the commitment of municipal authorities and the enthusiasm of much of the cities' inhabitants to raising the local profile through investing in and celebrating art galleries, museums, concert halls, and the urban civic space. Programmes for urban renewal which would once have looked to business parks and shopping centres now turn to creativity and public culture to regenerate the civic community and the city centre.

There are other reasons for the high standing of the arts and humanities. The Council for Science and Technology, established to advise the government on science issues, published a report a couple of years ago under the title *Imagination and Understanding*. It argued why the arts and humanities were so necessary to national life and well-being, and emphasised the imagination and flexibility of graduates and postgraduates in our disciplines which the CST saw as essential to societies but also economies in the 21st century. There are also, of course, the economic arguments, which have proved particularly persuasive with government: the strong and growing role of the creative industries and the importance of cultural institutions to the tourist industry.

There are certainly other reasons for the strengths of our disciplines in public esteem, and together they help explain why the government has decided to establish an Arts and Humanities Research Council. This was announced in the White Paper on higher education published by the Department for Education and Skills in January, as well as in a joint statement by the four administrations in the UK. It will join the existing research councils in the Office of Science and Technology. It is important that in our new location we celebrate and maintain what is distinctive about arts and humanities research, and protect what is special about the way the AHRB has worked and related to its community, and I am confident that that can be achieved. It is worth rising to the challenge, because the arts and humanities will now take their place alongside all other disciplines, able to show that our research is as central to national life and well-being as that of other disciplines, and able to make the case for improved funding for the arts and humanities. It will also give us the opportunity to work more effectively on a cross-council basis with science and social science disciplines. It is as an Arts and Humanities Research Council that the standing and resourcing of our disciplines can best be advanced, and we look forward to the challenge.

The AHRB has much on its mind in addition to the transition to a research council. We have been increasingly vocal as a voice for arts and humanities research, for example engaging regularly with Sir Gareth Roberts as he leads the review of research assessment for the funding councils. The metrics-driven models which have dominated discussion cannot be adapted to the arts and humanities, and we have emphasised the importance of peer review in any assessment process. We await with interest the consultation document from the steering group. We have also been pressing the claims for the arts and humanities to be eligible for funding through the next phase of the Science Research Infrastructure Fund, and we were pleased to see that this has now been achieved, to allow the refurbishment and expansion of arts and humanities research space and infrastructure. We are also increasingly active on the European stage, seeking to ensure that research and funding opportunities develop for arts and humanities in this country, and that the internationalism of our subject communities is enhanced.

This is the essential context within which the AHRB's work in support of research in English is situated. We are also looking closely at our own programmes. We shall continue to emphasise our two core programmes, Research Leave addressing the needs of the individual researcher, and Research Grants for collaborative work requiring larger teams. We shall keep our wide portfolio of other programmes under review, seeking to ensure that they are in tune with the needs of arts and humanities researchers. We shall also maintain responsive mode as the dominant way in which we distribute our awards. However, we do believe that we have a role to play in initiating programmes where we believe that dedicated funding could help stimulate areas of work (especially interdisciplinary work) which discussions with our research community tell us have real potential and yet which are not receiving sufficient applications through responsive mode. We shall shortly be launching two such programmes, one on 'ICT in Arts and Humanities Research' and the other, jointly with EPSRC, on 'Designing for the 21st Century'. The responsive mode will, quite properly, remain dominant in the arts and humanities, but we look forward to working with researchers to develop specific new areas of activity, including work in collaboration with other research councils.

The pattern of applications for research grants in English is an interesting one. In 2001/02 there were in total 154 applications, which represented 10 per cent of the applications for all subjects. The distribution of applications across different schemes is uneven and therefore interesting. Resource Enhancement attracted from English 10 per cent of all applications in that scheme, exactly the same as that of English across all schemes. That seems to me surprising, because one might have expected Resource Enhancement to be especially attractive to some core dimensions of research in English, including the editing of texts. Applications for Research Leave are particularly strong, with 16 per cent of all applications to that scheme coming from English. It is not surprising that a scheme devised to provide individual humanities researchers with the time to complete a piece of work should prove so popular amongst English researchers. It is surely disappointing, however, that the interest in more collaborative or team-based research should be so muted: just 6 per cent of all applications for the Research Grant scheme came from English in 2001-02 (and that dropped to 5 per cent in the latest round, for which figures have just emerged). There is strong collaborative work going on in English, but less so than in many other humanities disciplines. We have discussed this with subject associations at one of our newly-established consultative meetings, in which CCUE was an active participant, and we would welcome thoughts on this pattern.

The AHRB has also been thinking about its postgraduate competitions, something about which we have consulted widely with the sector over the last year. Higher education institutions received before Christmas the document setting out the decisions which we have now made, so I need only summarise the main headlines here. We shall maintain student-driven competitions (rather than moving to a quota-based system), but shift the balance of awards gradually over time, in order to fund more doctoral students than at present. The change will not be dramatic, but we believe it to be the right one in the context of tight resources, and our consultation indicated that others agreed. We shall reorganise our Masters competitions into two new categories: Masters degrees which combine advanced study with preparation for doctoral research and Masters degrees which prepare students for professional and vocational practice. We shall also expect institutions to have in place a flexible but demanding framework for training research students, with provision geared to the needs of the student and the project. All of these matters are explained in the document sent to institutions, which is also available on our website. We are also setting up a working group to examine the humanities PhD. How well is it now fulfilling its dual role of producing a significant contribution to research and a highly-qualified and talented individual? Is the three-year period of study appropriate (the Roberts Review of science and technology proposed a three-and-a-half year funded period)? And are there alternative models for the doctorate which should be supported, in particular the 'new route' PhDs?

The AHRB's postgraduate competitions saw a substantial increase in applications in 2001/02. The success rate for applicants in English were generally closely in line with those for all disciplines: 25 per cent for Masters programmes (compared with 26 per cent for all subjects), 30 per cent for doctoral programmes (cf. 29 per cent), 26 per cent for Professional & Vocational Awards (cf. 27 per cent), and out of line only in the case of the small doctoral programmes in the creative and performing arts, where the success rate of 29 per cent (cf. 43 per cent) may well have reflected the lower level of experience in the creative writing applications which will have constituted the English contribution to this competition. The English panel last year classified the applications which it received into different periods, and the results are interesting. Of 407 applications for a Competition B doctoral award, there were just 4 applications for Old English; 17 for medieval and renaissance; 12 for the sixteenth century; 30 for the seventeenth century; 25 for the eighteenth century; 15 for the eighteenth/nineteenth century; 58 for the nineteenth century; 16 for the nineteenth/twentieth century; 133 for the twentieth century. There were also 51 applications for American literature and 42 on miscellaneous and interdisciplinary projects. The chronological classification is that devised by the panel, and it raises important questions about the balance of periods favoured by prospective doctoral students, the reasons for those choices, and the implications for the renewal of the academic profession in English. Is this something about which we should all be concerned? We would welcome the advice of the English research community.

The applications for creative writing PhD awards raises the broader question of how one defines and assesses creative writing as research-based practice. The issues are similar to those in branches of the creative and performing arts: how does one distinguish creative practice which is rooted in research from that which is not? As creative writing applications increase – for Fellowships in the Creative and Performing Arts as well as for doctoral research – these issues need to be resolved, and in doing so we shall need the help of the English subject community.

The balance of doctoral applications and the question of creative writing as research are just two of the issues on which we seek the advice of the subject community, through events such as the CCUE Conference which I addressed in December and the English and Languages Subject Group Meeting which the AHRB held in January. There are other issues on which we seek advice, such as how the AHRB should respond to long-running editing projects. We have to be wary about tying up too much of our funding in continuing commitments, and the panel considers each application on its merits, with no promises of future funding. The projects are often valuable ones, but so too are the innovative research and resource enhancement proposals which we receive, and which we are anxious to be able to fund in the future.

On these and other issues we have to make choices about scarce resources. None of us should assume that becoming a research council will increase the funding available, because the case will have to be made in each Spending Review, though I believe that placing us firmly within the mainstream of UK research funding will make it easier for us to make that case. We shall always be faced with difficult decisions about how to allocate scarce funding, how to support continuing strengths in research while at the same time launching initiatives to stimulate innovative and often interdisciplinary work. In this and other matters we will continue to need the advice and ideas which are generously given by researchers across all our disciplines. As the AHRB becomes an AHRC in the next couple of years, we are determined to maintain the lively interaction between ourselves and our research community which has characterised our early years, and which I believe has been so important for the achievements of arts and humanities research in the UK.

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The ILTHE: What's in it for English Lecturers?

Andrea L. T. Rayner
Assistant Director: External Relations, The Institute for Learning and Teaching in Higher Education (ILTHE)

There has never been a better time to join the Institute for Learning and Teaching in Higher Education (ILTHE). For the first time ever, university teaching has achieved a high profile in a Government White Paper; there are hints that teaching will begin to enjoy parity of esteem with research in universities; and the White Paper states that all new teaching staff will be expected to receive accredited training by 2006.

The ILTHE is the professional body for all who teach and support learning in higher education and is well placed to play a key role in taking forward these new priorities. It was set up as a result of recommendations of the National Committee of Inquiry into Higher Education (the Dearing Report, 1997), which suggested that higher education was unique in the UK education sector in having no articulated professional standards for learning and teaching. Two years later the ILTHE was founded, and it is now a recognised professional body working with teachers and supporters of learning in higher education to enhance the status of teaching, improve the experience of learning and support innovation. It is also a thriving membership organisation with over 14,000 members recruited in just three years.

The ILTHE confers professional recognition by admitting individuals to membership through a rigorous process of peer review (called the Individual Entry Route for Experienced Staff), and by implementing the largest UK-wide framework for accrediting training programmes in HE teaching provided by higher education institutions. Since its inception it has accredited 164 such programmes at 112 HE institutions as routes leading to eligibility for Membership.

But why, you might ask, are we encouraging people to join the Institute at a time when rumours are rife (in the press and elsewhere) of its imminent demise or merger into a new organisation? Both the White Paper and the report of the Teaching Quality Enhancement Committee (TQEC) have proposed the creation of a new single body to support quality enhancement in university teaching, provisionally called the 'Academy for the Advancement of Learning and Teaching in Higher Education'. It would be formed by the merger of the ILTHE and the other main agencies who support QE: the Learning and Teaching Support Network (LTSN) and the Higher Education Staff Development Agency (HESDA).

The reason there has never been a better time to join is because current members of the ILTHE will enjoy a unique opportunity to have a direct say in shaping the future of quality enhancement. Existing ILTHE members will be asked to vote on the proposals later this year, and will also be guaranteed a privileged status in any new Academy if they vote for a merger.

What are the benefits of joining the ILTHE?
Many in the sector would argue that standards of teaching and learning support cannot be raised by dictat or legislation, but rather by individuals committing themselves to keeping up to date with new developments and sharing good practice. This view is central to the ILTHE's ethos. It offers enhancement opportunities for its members through a range of services. These include an international peer-reviewed journal, *Active Learning in Higher Education*, which is explicitly concerned with improving practice and is available free to members three times a year. The ILTHE has also commissioned a series of practitioner-oriented handbooks on *Effective Learning and Teaching*, which are published by Kogan Page in association with *The Times Higher Education Supplement*. Each volume in the series covers aspects of curriculum design, delivery and assessment in the 24 subjects covered by the Learning and Teaching Support Network (LTSN), and they are available to members at a 20% discount. Peter Hartley (Head of Humanities in the School of Cultural Studies at Sheffield Hallam University and a National Teaching Fellowship winner in 2000) is currently working with three other National Teaching Fellows from English disciplines to develop a proposal for a book in the *Effective Learning and Teaching* series.

The ILTHE publishes a members' newsletter and holds at least two free or low-cost regional forums per year in each region of the UK, as well as special interest forums on issues such as Virtual Learning Environments and supporting students with disabilities.

The ILTHE also offers 'Small Grants to Make a Difference' to enable members to undertake teaching-related activities that would not otherwise be possible. One of our most popular services is a fortnightly e-letter, emailed directly to individual members and linked to a new, specially commissioned article on a topic of current interest in learning and teaching, which is posted on the members - only area of our website.

We hold the largest general conference devoted to learning and teaching in the UK. This year it will take place at the University of Warwick from 2–4 July and its theme is: 'What Works? Reviewing Good Practice for Learning and Teaching in Higher Education'.

But the benefit that our members told us, in a recent survey, that they value above all is professional recognition and transferable endorsement of their teaching.

The Future
The ILTHE is already working closely with the LTSN and HESDA. Commenting on the White Paper and the TQEC's proposals, Dr Caroline Bucklow, the ILTHE's Acting Chief Executive, said: "We look forward to playing an active part in setting the new university teaching standards, building on the strong foundation of our accreditation scheme which has won wide acceptance in the HE sector. Our members have argued strongly that excellence in teaching should have the same status and rewards as excellence in research, and have called for recognition of the value of their work in teaching and learning support. We are pleased that their voice has been heard".

The ILTHE's Council believes that the Academy offers an exciting opportunity for the HE sector to increase its commitment to develop and promote best practice in teaching. The best way of influencing the outcome is to join the ILTHE now and ensure that the voice of the individual lecturer is heard in the forthcoming debate on teaching quality enhancement.

Further Information
For further details of routes to membership or membership benefits, please contact Membership Services at the Institute for Learning and Teaching, Genesis 3, Innovation Way, York Science Park, York YO10 5DQ, tel 01904 434222, or see www.ilt.ac.uk or email enquiries@ilt.ac.uk.

National Teaching Fellowship Scheme winners in English
English has been well represented in the National Teaching Fellowship Scheme (NTFS), which is managed by the ILTHE on behalf of The Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) and the Department for Employment and Learning in Northern Ireland. Seven winners in the first three years of the Scheme have come from the English subject community. Below, three of the NTFS English winners report on what they have gained from the Scheme and how they are using their £50,000 awards.

Gaining a National Teaching Fellowship has given me the space and independence to develop new ways of encouraging English students to engage actively in the learning process. I used the larger part of the money to employ a Research Assistant (Karen O'Rourke) to look at how Problem-Based Learning works in subjects such as Medicine across the world. With this knowledge, we worked on adapting models to suit the discipline of English. We've been running third-year courses by means of Problem Based Learning for two years now, and student feedback has been encouragingly positive. The ILTHE has provided us with support, a means of meeting other people actively developing teaching projects and sharing ideas, and–through ILTAC (the ILTHE Annual Conference) and local forums–an opportunity to disseminate our project. As a direct result of the project, we have now set up a Pedagogic Research Centre in the Arts Faculty at Manchester. This, we hope, will encourage other teachers in Arts subjects to engage in projects, small or large. The ILTHE is about encouraging a professional and active approach to teaching, and it has been the essential means of allowing me to do my small bit for developing teaching in our subject area.
Bill Hutchings, University of Manchester, NTFS 2000

Among CCUE's numerous activities at the moment, I feel a strong personal interest in its partnership in the 'Common English Forum'. Having started my teaching life in schools (and still a member of NATE), I have never felt that there were clear-cut divisions between the sectors; and in English, the distinctions often seem particularly artificial and limiting. It is one of the few subjects where individuals can find themselves revisiting the same text at a number of points throughout their reading life; and experiencing it in ways that 'level descriptors' or linear models of 'progress' simply cannot register. In the early 1990s, when I was working as a joint lecturer in English and Education, I often found myself over a single week meeting 'English' students at every level from lower primary to PhD. Sometimes they were even working on the same author or text *(The Tempest, The Color Purple, Jane Eyre …The Wizard of Earthsea)*; and these encounters, though different for each age group, seemed to be equally rich and satisfying–for the teachers as well as the students. Trying out some of the 'secondary' school methods on my third-year undergraduates would often stimulate their most interesting and exciting work. Similarly, offering 'demanding' materials to younger pupils could often produce astonishing responses. Now, with some time and funds, my project is giving me the chance to try to work more intensively with my students, exploring this 'Common English' territory: to encourage them to reflect on their own layered reading histories, to look at their experiences of revisiting texts and to conceptualise their changing responses, and to move outside the HE classroom, to work with younger readers in schools, sharing ideas and materials about our 'common' texts.

In the inter-RAE years, I was delighted at the initiatives (the ILTHE, the LTSN Subject Centres) that gave a public profile to teaching in HE, and I first joined the ILTHE as a way of affirming my support. To my surprise, in personal terms, writing the application itself helped me to draw together my own rather fragmented teaching history, and make more sense of it–a process that somehow ended in my NTFS award. With CCUE, the English Subject Centre, and the ILTHE, I feel in touch with a much wider world of interested colleagues, and I value the sense that we all have more of a voice, in English and in a further common forum beyond.
Pamela Knights, University of Durham, NTFS 2002

My NTFS project focuses on supporting students to take an overview of their skills development, drawing on activities both inside and outside the curriculum. It is a response to a range of recent initiatives including: benchmarking and programme specifications, the HE Active Communities funding which is encouraging staff and students to undertake voluntary work in the community, Students' Union agendas to enhance student training and employability and the ever-accelerating development of C&IT in HE for the support of learners. The University of Nottingham supports students' personal development planning through Personal and Academic Records schemes, first introduced in English Studies in 1993, based on the personal tutoring system and subsequently customised by different disciplines. My project will complement the electronic version of this concept, currently in use by about 3,000 staff and students, with an activity-driven approach to recording evidence of skills and building resources for job applications and CVs. Although this project is generic, rather than specific to English, I plan to develop an English Studies angle on it for the chapter I will be contributing to a book on

Learning and Teaching in English, which many of the NTFs in English are getting together to publish shortly. I would be delighted to hear from any colleagues from other HEIs who have relevant practice to share or views which they would be happy to contribute to the research-base of this study.

What I have gained from membership of ILTHE is a new network of imaginative student-centred educators, refreshingly collaborative and enthusiastic.
Dr Angela Smallwood, University of Nottingham, NTFS 2000

My interdisciplinary National Teaching Fellowship project combines old texts with new technologies and academic content with pedagogical research into process. It involves undergraduates from a range of Arts disciplines in staging seventeenth century plays by a woman dramatist, which have no previous recorded performance history. Margaret Cavendish, Duchess of Newcastle (1623-73) was the first woman to publish plays in folio, imitating Ben Jonson and Shakespeare. She challenged gendered attitudes to dramatic authorship with the question: 'Why may not a lady write a good play?' (*Playes 1662* 'An Introduction' sig..B, p.2).

Largely as a consequence of the political turmoil of her day, Cavendish's plays have no recorded performance history in the public theatre. My project therefore offers students the opportunity to engage in pioneering work in exploring and reshaping the English dramatic canon. Productions are recorded on digital video, and will be available as study and teaching aids for students and staff working on early modern drama. The project's pedagogical dimensions comprise an investigation of student peer-learning and team skills development across Arts subjects, including English Literature.

Margaret Cavendish was a highly future-oriented prolific proto-feminist dramatist. She dedicated her 1668 collection of plays to: 'future Ages, for which I intend all my Books' (*Plays Never before Printed* 1668 'To The Readers' sig. A2r). I have found that students are excited and engaged by the opportunity and challenge of taking on a variety of interpretative and production roles in bringing 17thC play-texts to 21stC audiences' attention.

I believe that the work and, indeed, the existence of the ILTHE have served to enable and generate interest in real world research projects such as mine, which combine academic and pedagogical dimensions in an innovative way. ILTHE's administration of the NTFS is exemplary and facilitative—I would encourage other English lecturers to use ILTHE membership as a springboard for developing their own creative strategies and projects which might lead to further NTFS awards within English.
Gweno Williams, York St John College NTFS 2002

English and Widening Participation

Dr Siobhán Holland
(Project Officer, Academic Liaison and Research, English Subject Centre (LTSN))

As academics in the disciplines of English Literature, Language and Creative Writing, we tend to see ourselves as being self-aware about issues of exclusion and silence. We are, by and large, watchful of boundaries and structures that naturalise varieties of marginalisation. We are accustomed to listen out for voices that are being ignored. It makes sense then that English as a discipline should find itself broadly in sympathy with the principles of the widening participation agenda in Higher Education, even if the practicalities of implementing that agenda within the constraints of the diminishing resources available prompt scepticism.

On behalf of the English Subject Centre, I have written a *Good Practice Guide for Access and Widening Participation in English* which has just been circulated to all departments that teach English Literature, Language and Creative Writing[1] In the process, I have worked closely with colleagues in the English departments at Manchester Metropolitan University, the University of Teesside and King Alfred's College, Winchester. The case studies developed through these collaborations have helped the English Subject Centre to establish a sense of how best we might respond as a subject community to the issues involved in recruiting and supporting students who have been excluded from HE because traditional recruiting methods have marginalised people who share their class, race, gender, age or disabilities. *The Good Practice Guide*, which includes three departmental case studies, a student case study and a substantial discussion of support mechanisms for students with disabilities, offers colleagues an introduction to the kinds of issues that departments might need to consider in the context of reviewing current practice in AWP.

The case studies look at aspects of the recruitment and induction process in departments which have successfully recruited under-represented students. What becomes clear is the importance these departments, and their students, attach to processes which are transparent, informative and generate a sense of ownership for the student involved. A clear admissions process can help to boost confidence, which is often low in students from under-represented groups. As one lecturer at Teesside explained: "students need to feel that they have been seen, evaluated and then let in. Quite often the students who [feel] that they got in by mistake, are not [those] who are struggling. They just needed that stamp of approval initially to give them that initial firm foundation".

As well as fostering a sense of the legitimacy of their studentship, departments can encourage students by providing unambiguous and timely information about courses and their delivery modes before the student applies for a place on a programme. For legal reasons, course documentation needs to be clear about the provision that will be made for disabled students on a day-to-day basis. For practical reasons this kind of information can be circulated to all students so that, for example, they can plan childcare arrangements or part-time work contracts before term begins rather than during the stressful first few weeks of their first semester. English departments have an excellent track record in recruiting and supporting mature women students, but the students interviewed for the Subject Centre's study suggested that this track record only became clear to them after they had enrolled. Providing information or signalling its availability throughout the application process can help to encourage a broader range of applications from under-represented groups.

What becomes clear in the departmental case studies included in the English Subject Centre's *Good Practice Guide* is the need for good practice to extend beyond the recruitment and induction processes. If, as the lecturers and students I've spoken to suggest, confidence remains the biggest issue inhibiting students from a sense that they can participate fully in the processes of questioning and risk-taking that a degree in our disciplines will demand of them, then it is important for us to establish environments which foster student confidence. Lecturers in each of the departments involved in the study rejected the charges of 'dumbing down' that are often levelled at colleagues who introduce curriculum change to support student learning and build confidence. Each of the departments involved has developed different strategies for inducting students into their discipline's discursive community. Lecturers variously use separate skills modules or more traditional courses with embedded skills elements to encourage students to practise and become independent in the use of subject-specific discourses and reading strategies. All of the lecturers interviewed made it clear that their aim was to provide the foundations for genuinely independent study through the provision of clarity and support at the outset of a student's programme. While none of us would be happy 'spoon-feeding' our students, we are perhaps under an obligation to give them equal access to the 'knives and forks' that enable all of them to study on equal terms.

The suggestion that what students from under-represented groups need is a 'level playing field' is misleading and potentially dangerous one and it is particularly unhelpful when it is applied to provision for students with disabilities. As Howard Newby has commented, universities often think of disability strategies in terms of ramp-building programmes (National Disability Team conference, March 2002). Too often that perception is shared in our departments and the idea that provision for students with disabilities is a practical problem to be dealt with at institutional or faculty level is widespread. In fact, only 4% of disabled people in the UK are wheelchair-users and this proportion is the same among the population of HE students with disabilities. Meanwhile, the bulk of prosecutions for breaches of education disability law in Australia—where the legislation is similar to the SENDA legislation introduced here in September 2002[2]—have sought to redress non-ramp-based, departmental sins of omission and commission. It is at subject-level that students find support lacking, or have to ask repeatedly and with increasing embarrassment for its provision. Rather than automatically defending our existing practice, we need to think about the role it plays in actively disabling students.

I'd pick out four areas where we might change our practice collectively, immediately and with positive effects. We could start with vocabulary. You don't need a degree in English to work out that referring to a student as a 'wheelchair user' is less disabling than referring to her as 'wheelchair-bound'. We could support students with visual impairments by notifying them in advance of specific passages in texts which are going to be discussed during a seminar. As a third strategy, we could produce handouts and booklets using sans serif fonts such as Arial and Comic Sans which are easier for many students to read than fonts which are more elaborate. Then we could print them on coloured paper rather than 'bright' white paper which can increase the distortion of print for dyslexic students. Finally, when we are developing web-based learning materials, we could tag our resource pages appropriately so that they can be used by students using screen readers.

The last two strategies bring us back to the need for departmental work on access and widening participation to be supported by institutional provision of resources, training and support. Beyond the institution, and working at subject-level, the English Subject Centre can offer advice and a guide to resources in and beyond the discipline. We can also share examples of good practice so that, as academics in English Language, Literature and Creative Writing, we can work collectively to counter the kinds of silencing and exclusion in our teaching practice that we so effectively expose through our research.[3]

Footnotes

[1] Siobhán Holland, *Access and Widening Participation: A Good Practice Guide* (English Subject Centre, 2003). Copies have been circulated to departments and can be downloaded from the English Subject Centre website at http://www.english.ltsn.ac.uk
[2] Links to the legislation are available via the 'Access Issues' page on the English Subject Centre website.
[3] I would welcome responses to the page and suggestions for its development. If you would like to comment on the page or suggest ideas for inclusion, please contact esc@rhul.ac.uk.

Myriad-Minded Participation

Ian McCormick
University College Northampton

As I complete this article the issue of future funding, linked to fees and widening participation, is being fiercely debated. Although the precise outcome is not yet clear, there can be little doubt that institutions will have to demonstrate their commitment to greater social inclusion. Action on access is already underway as HE moves towards the Government's medium-term goal for the sector - that one half of those under thirty will have had some experience of HE by 2010. Existing policy has been geared to attracting students who are 'under-represented' according to postcodes. Additional future funding could be guillotined ('inspected') if agreed targets on more representative participation are not reached, or if policies are not in place to address broader issues of improved access, greater equality, and success in retaining students. In this short article I offer an account of several initiatives which are underway in English and personal reflections upon them. I will be assessing the impact of multiple interventions and policies designed to deliver both greater participation and rising standards. As a case study, I shall be describing my own experience in relation to a school-university "Shakespeare Day" which addressed some of the problems of participation through "accelerated learning" and "multiple intelligence" models of teaching and learning.

Action on access is underway in many institutions. Siobhán Holland's thought-provoking and pragmatic report is available on-line on the English Subject Centre website: it is recommended reading. To be clear, at the outset: many initiatives are being softly powered from above and within and build on existing good practices. Moreover, the pattern is more one of structured and greater outreach rather than a new era of positive discrimination or American-style "affirmative action". Public debate has been surprisingly muted concerning the degree-result outcomes of lower grade/poor background entrants compared to those with better grades achieved in a more selective and/or more prosperous milieu. Admissions tutors must match applicants to entry requirements as supply to demand, yet making predictions about deriving a first-class candidate from a CCC-student compared to a CCD-student would be a precarious enterprise. At the same time as one questions the point-score price-mechanism, it is worth noting that post-16 education is in transition now that national policy agendas are less fixated on early years standards, inspections, and testing. Post-16 and HE are on the national agenda. Teaching and learning strategies post-16 are under greater scrutiny with a view to raising standards, usually in the form of relevant partnership interventions.

Despite the weakness of A-level grades as a predictor of outcomes three years later, most admissions tutors would argue that there is insufficient time for individual interviews, or other forms of entry requirement, in addition to the variety of certifications already on offer. On the other hand, excellent relations with local schools may help to share skills and build trust by eliminating perceived barriers. We can be sure that the culture of certification will not be dismantled, but the boundaries and policing of layers and levels of education must be contested. This is happening. Increasingly school teachers and HE lecturers inhabit overlapping territory, rather than waving across a sublime chasm.

For the majority of English course teams who are rising to the challenge, widening participation will include a recognition of weaknesses as well as of strengths. Accordingly, more meetings, more training, more work, unsurprisingly; yet new initiatives also unleash new resources, creative solutions, and ultimately greater satisfaction for all involved in fulfilling the wider liberal goals of education in the humanities. Renewed notions of civic responsibility (as Brian Massumi has argued) require active empathy and a performative as well as cognitive pedagogy. An excess of new-fangled projects and initiatives may leave one open to satirical censure. I contend, nonetheless, that carefully planned exercises in participation and 'accelerated learning' can be judged by their outcomes.

The culture of inclusion deeply permeates the curriculum already in a majority of institutions, in an emphasis on the quality of the learning experience. In many cases lectures and seminars are supplemented, or supplanted, by more accessible e-learning opportunities. Nonetheless, the ITC-tendency has been hurrying on headlong in some modules - more as an end in itself - than as an improved strategy for critical and creative engagement. Such projects require careful audit of their planning, implementation, and outcomes, to ensure that they further the education of the learner with special needs, and the school-leaver from an ethnic minority, and the single parent. Sensitive issues such gender disparities and contradictions, as well as the achievement gap between students of Chinese and Caribbean origin also require careful scrutiny and analysis at every level. What we provide is just as significant to modern times - as relevant and urgent - as any fixation on how we provide it. For our role as content providers, rather than would-be technologists, one can cite the words of Microsoft's Paul Allen:

People are pioneering new content that has the immediacy of television, the depth of print and the personal adaptability of computer software. Education as we know it will be transformed by the possibilities of interactive lesson materials and customized content on any subject, at any distance. Entertainment will involve audiences and become a more active experience. Here is where the artists take over from the scientists. Content, be it persuasive, informative or inspirational, has always depended on creative talent. Science has opened the door, but artistry and imagination will take us through it.

Variety, flexibility, and choice in the selection and delivery of materials are just some aspects of the participation debate. Perhaps most difficult to target and retain are those learners from multiple minority or non-participatory backgrounds. Although there has been a shift to syllabus design which reflects outsider or minority identifications, there are also many forces at work which may limit course content, relevant issues, and full participation in debate. As one Canadian teachers' guide puts it, "sensitive or controversial" areas include: "Mythology, legends, the supernatural, magic, fantasy, witches and witchcraft, death and suicide, sex and gender, violence, abuse, profanity and swearing, evolution, politics, religion, race, bioethics, drugs, and ideologies."

From another angle, participation in learning comes back to our vision of the discipline in the context of an unequal postmodern environment. In a recent interview, Amitava Kumar, currently Associate Professor of English at Penn State University and author of *Bombay-London-New York* (Penguin) was asked "What is the value of teaching literature to societies like Pakistan and India where, after all, medicine, engineering, and information technology are the breadwinners? What kind of literature should be taught and how?" His answer is a telling renegotiation of values of peculiar relevance to a broader debate on what constitutes participation:

If I was an administrator or an idealistic teacher, I would say that these books should teach each of us about our rights and our fight for a better future. But I won't say that. Instead, I will say that the books we teach or offer in the libraries should tell us more about our ordinary, flawed humanity. These books should help us see ourselves better. They should allow us to recognize and name - and sometimes, even change - those qualities that make us human. If we don't do this, we will die of violence or just go mad.

Yet there is a sense, in some quarters, of political intervention and an ideological intervention lurking behind the emerging manifesto of widening participation. After years of teaching the secret and sacred concepts and discourses of theory, the lecturer now participates in a structured approach to student learning and reflection, from skills to work-placements, from preferred learning programmes to 'what's in it for me', (WIIFM) student-led motivational analysis.

Success cannot be enforced from above; the best outcomes are likely to be achieved by and through shared initiatives; not those imposed as 'solutions': one-stop points-of-entry post-code targets-to-be-met. Enrichment will be judged by retention and results. The process will be experienced in an increasingly virtual learning-teaching continuum of the subject-centre and the institution. Institutions thrive if they have a living fund of enrichment as well as an ear to the ground. Our existing students are an under-used asset - they are living through learning in a way that legitimates and authenticates their voices as the prime audit of our participation strategies. More crucially, they are a bridge between the opted-in and the opted-out. There is no better advert for potential applicants, wary of the unknown adventure ahead of them, than a confident and dynamic selection of students from the first year cohort The encounter need not be a token, one-off gesture. Indeed, many institutions are asking first year students to mentor future or potential applicants; they in their turn will be mentored by students from the next level. Such fostering cannot be imposed, but it may need a bump-start in the form of an honorarium for those taking part.

For me, going back to school after eighteen years, and after twelve spent inside Academia, left me with a pressing sense of the need to engage in a relevant audit of English, and how it works, in a world of work. When did any of us last hold access interviews in a factory or job-centre? Again, time and resources are issues, but we must keep a sense of the space of potential participations, and reach out more to them. On the other hand, access students might benefit more from a supportive interview and special induction after being awarded a place. HE is often more alienating and strange than many of us remember or imagine. Even the differences between seminars, lectures, tutorials, and the kind of skills appropriate may need explanation. Other guidance, support and encouragement might usefully be provided by the effective student mentoring scheme that may institutions are encouraging. Careers talks precede rather than follow the undergraduate degree. English is in a strong position in this regard, for it can point to the employability, earning power, and the flexibility of its graduates, demonstrated in further training. Few students have the luxury of only undertaking work during the summer or other vacations. Creative cvs can also be instructive, relevant, and fun exercises in an imaginative project. In one example I came across, a third year seminar class was asked to compose a curriculum vitae for a character from one of *Volpone, Tamburlaine* and *Hamlet*. The exercise was a playful deviation from and towards the text. Volpone and Mosca had particular strengths in the self-promotion market… In another exercise, mathematical ability was tested with reference to the sense of proportion in *Gulliver's Travels*… spatial awareness in the architecture of Gothic fiction… These are postmodern times; the logic of pastiche is playfully exhilarating; a variety of skills can be integrated without losing more familiar way of debating texts.

In a short article of this nature there is insufficient space to debate the full ramifications of the Special Educational Needs and Disability Act (SENDA 2001). The issue is not, however, just one of minimal legislative compliance, but a need to assess just how far our mainstream teaching comprehends the values - as interpretative strategies - at the centre of our teaching and learning. For instance, how does one teach the theme of blindness in *King Lear*, or kinds of vision in *Gulliver's Travels*, to a group which includes a student who is blind? These are not issues which will disappear from view. Sexuality is also infrequently touched upon in the widening participation debate. Pupils bullied on account of their sexuality and teachers restricted by the self-censorship of Clause 28 ('pretended family relationships') are unlikely to reach their full potential, early or late in their education, without a struggle. A lesbian student is likely to suffer the double exclusion of gender and sexuality. On a different note, why does Engineering fail to attract women, and English men? It is not just that we need to ponder these obvious imbalances in their own right, but we need to ascertain what one discipline can learn from another in terms of the logics of exclusion or intimidation.

I should like to conclude by recording my own experience of a collaboration with Janet Florey and other teachers from Mereway Upper School, Northampton. During the year, the English

participation group explored a number of 'problem' issues in teaching and learning in English. It was finally decided to hold a sixth form 'Teaching Shakespeare Day' that would confront directly some of the most difficult aspects of *King Lear* and *The Tempest* in terms of teaching and learning strategies. The day was an opportunity to pilot up to six activities catering for different learning styles using the 'accelerated learning' model, informed by the multiple intelligences theory. In brief, the model of different kinds of intelligence is derived from Howard Gardner. These are (1) linguistic; (2) mathematical-logical; (3) visual-spatial; (4) musical; (5) naturalist; (6) inter-personal; (7) intra-personal; (8) bodily-physical. Specifically, our aim was to test the hypothesis that, even in the sixth form, aspects of the plays could be taught using a variety of intelligences in addition to the primary verbal-linguistic mode of teaching.

The students were familiar with the notion of preferred schemes of learning profile. At the beginning of the day, students undertook a fresh assessment of their preferred learning style. Our assumption was that much improved learning and understanding could be achieved by providing a variety of learning opportunities and a range of teaching strategies during the course of the day. Crucially, students would respond best to those styles which had the best fit with their own learning profile and style. There was also an underlying assumption that A-level teaching must be relevant to the text and the requirements of the syllabus.

In each session the emphasis was on making the text accessible by providing opportunities for spontaneous and creative response. Throughout the day there was an open and critical engagement with Shakespeare's plays as contemporary and living theatre. Four small groups of students had the opportunity to carousel around the activities, which were facilitated by pairs of staff. Each activity used a different learning approach to explore the text. These included topics such as "Vision and Illusion"; "Character Soundscape"; "Family Photographs"; "The Tempest I.i"; "Shakespeare's Blind Date" and "Classifying Caliban". The teaching and resource pack included full lesson plans for each of these sessions, and is now available as a resource. In addition to the teaching provided by Mereway and UCN staff, Matthew Gray, (Independent Thinking Ltd.) acted as a special advisor and observer for the day. He also ran a session on performing Shakespeare, which crystallized many of the emerging themes and strategies from the earlier sessions.

Clearly there were advantages and disadvantages in having a full day of intensive activities in a different venue and environment (the University College) with unfamiliar teachers. Nor had we made any compromises by selecting easy material. Also, most of the students were new to the plays, although they had had some previous experience of reading Shakespeare. A number of the students had chosen subjects related to English such as Drama (40%) for A-level. None the less, our preparatory research pointed to the fact that although a high proportion of the student's self-evaluations pointed to a preference for linguistic learning (50%), another 30% expressed a preference for an emphasis on visual-spatial learning. The workshops and exercises often gave the impression of moving away from a traditional textual analysis of chosen passages. But closer inspection of the teaching-learning scenario indicates that through innovative teaching strategies there was a return to central issues in the plays, and that this was informed by deeper understanding and greater enthusiasm. Improved comprehension went hand in hand with growing confidence.

Not all exercises appealed to all students in the same way, or to the same degree. A student who was an active learner in one exercise, would be, perhaps, more passive in another. For the individual learner there were strengths and weaknesses in each session. As the feedback evaluation demonstrated, every student was at some point fired and stimulated. The learners surprised us, and they surprised themselves: they were enjoying themselves, expressing themselves; they were learning. Most importantly, and most visibly, they were unlocking their potential through participation

As we find better ways of assisting and supporting the participation of such learners it is difficult to guess just how rewarding their success will be to the more privileged students they work alongside, and to the teachers who participate in their educational progress. Sounds like social engineering? In a sense it is, but we must be clear about those things which widening participation is not. Not passive learning; not dumbing down; not discrimination; not an inflexible curriculum; not tired modes of uniform assessment; not a privatised or privileged streaming. Shakespeare demands that we use many aspects of our experience, for pleasure and for instruction. In our encounter with his mind, it is crucial that we unlock and celebrate the diversity of our minds. The experiment was not legislative; we were not forced to accommodate each of Howard Gardner's eight intelligences in every seminar. We can, however, experiment more with those strategies which work, and this will vary from group to group, from learner to learner. At the centre of the curriculum and our heritage, Shakespeare is a peculiar and unpredictable test-case of widening and deepening participation, for as Coleridge noted, "the body and substance of his works came out of the unfathomable depths of his own oceanic mind". Nonetheless, an ideological focus on one kind of intelligence continues to restrict our encounter with Shakespeare's multiple mind and the accelerated mode in which his texts flourish as performance. To return to "our myriad-minded Shakespeare"—the outcome of the day could be summed up in the notion that "no one learning style suits everyone".

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Conference Announcement English: The Condition of the Subject

English Subject Centre

17th - 19th July 2003, Senate House, Malet Street, London WC1

'English: The Condition of the Subject' is a major opportunity to review current practice in English. Its aim is to reflect upon how English has been constituted in the classroom through the changes of the last ten years, how its manifestation in teaching lives alongside its manifestation in research, and what the future of English might be.

Questions asked at the conference will include:

1) What is the condition of English now, and how are its subjects (the curriculum, the students, lecturers and scholarship) constituted?

2) How have the mechanisms governing our professional lives in the modern university, and the culture of professionalism itself, affected the subject?

3) What is the English 'class' and how are we changing it or reinforcing it?

4) Is English a subject without centre or margins? Where is the literary to be located or reinvented?

And the following broad topics will be under review:

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• Global English
• The Future of Academic Publishing
• Language and Literature
• Theory: For and Against
• Teaching Creative Writing
• The Value and Point of English

CONFERENCE REGISTRATION DETAILS

The Institute of English Studies,University of London is handling all bookings for this conference. Early booking is advisable to guarantee a place and to help us calculate numbers. Bookings received after 26th June 2003 are charged at a higher rate. It is essential that we have your telephone or fax number or email address and any changes which will apply in June/July as we may need to contact you regarding any unforeseen events. Your cheque (payable to 'University of London ') or credit card authorisation should be sent with a Conference Registration Form to: The Administrator, Institute of English Studies, University of London, Senate House, Malet Street, London WC1E 7HU

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Any registration enquires should be sent to the address above or:
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