

Chair's Report 2000-2001

Every year seems a busy year. In the troughs between RAEs and TQAs, the next waves loom, and new initiatives and old fears pile up. Public policy discussion in British higher education never seems to sleep just now – nor, maybe, does it ever seem quite awake. But CCUE has an important and settled role in these debates. As Judy Simons noted in last year's report, official bodies of all kinds routinely consult the Council, and, on the evidence of extensive membership, full attendance at Ordinary and Annual General Meetings, and the heavy responses we gain to our own consultations, CCUE has good reason to think itself an authentic voice for the profession. It is one that other disciplines may envy. Earlier this year, the Council had a letter from a senior British philosopher seeking our advice on effective ways of establishing a similar body in that discipline.

The major activities this year were as follows.

- The Subject Centre for English has successfully been established at Royal Holloway under the direction of Philip Martin as a partnership between that university, CCUE and King's College, London. The meeting will hear a detailed account from Philip of the Centre's work to date, which is extensive. But the important point to emphasise from CCUE's perspective is its unique role in forming the agenda of the Centre and ensuring its responsiveness to the subject community. This year, CCUE will, in addition to its existing responsibilities, oversee the external scrutiny of the Centre's activities. The Executive will establish the protocols for this scrutiny and appoint suitable external advisors.
- CCUE has also been busy with other public bodies and issues. On research, the Council submitted a formal response to the HEFCE's 'Review of Research', a document that will shape future research policy and the conduct of assessment exercises. We also submitted a detailed, thorough response to the British Academy's 'Review of Graduate Studies in the Humanities and Social Sciences' based upon a consultation among members conducted by Michael Rossington. Representatives from the Academy, and the new Chief Executive of the AHRB, addressed the OGM on research issues, and the Executive returned nominations to the AHRB when invited to propose members of its English Panels.
- In other areas, the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) continues to consult the Council on the development of secondary provision in English and the National Curriculum Monitoring and Evaluation. Palgrave will also shortly publish a collection on the theme of *Literature in Context*, edited and written largely by past and present members of the Executive. In part, this responds to the new 'A' level syllabus and the volume carries an endorsement by a QCA Subject Officer for English. Meanwhile, Arthur Brown from QAA addressed the AGM on the forthcoming Academic Review of English, and – as in 1995 – CCUE has been invited to play a role in ensuring that the body of subject reviewers reflects the range of provision in the subject.
- More widely, the Council has continued to take forward the issue of the public understanding of English along the lines discussed at last year's meetings. Discussions are underway for a sponsored prize for scholarship in English, and openings have been created by Judy Simons for pieces of topical concern in the national press. In collaboration with the British Academy, and other bodies such as the Royal Society, CCUE proposes three conferences on 'Literature and Medicine', 'Literature and Biography' and the 'The Humanities and Employment' (the last of these in collaboration with the Council for University Deans in the Arts and Humanities). These will stress the importance of work in English to topics of wide public interest. Discussions are in progress too for a jointly organised conference with the British Academy on the pressing theme of the Humanities and Employment.
- CCUE has sought to extend its involvement with other cognate organisations. Responding to

an initiative from the English Association, the Council has, with the Institute for English Studies, the National Association for the Teaching of English (NATE) and other bodies, been instrumental in establishing the Common English Forum. The Forum is a loosely federated group, with representatives from these and other bodies, brought together to discuss important matters relating to the future of the subject, especially the relationship between the study of English in secondary schools and higher education. It will continue to meet over the coming year. Liaison with the European Society for the Study of English (ESSE), the Standing Conference on Arts and Social Sciences (SCASS) and the Council for University Deans in the Art and Humanities (CUDA) has been maintained.

- Within CCUE, thanks to the good work of Robert Clark, a refurbished CCUE website was launched (www.ccue.ac.uk), and a proposal from the membership that CCUE should support conferences of general professional interest to the subject community has been adopted. (Details are available on the website and in a forthcoming issue of *CCUENews*.)

We might now look ahead. Among the issues looming in the year to come will be: the 2001 RAE, the start of the QAA academic review, the impact of the new 'A' and 'AS' level qualifications, the recruitment pressures faced by the subject nationally, the continuing impact of the 'vocational' or 'employment' lobby on higher education generally and the humanities in particular, the growing importance of the study of English language ... another busy year. Throughout the last I have enjoyed the support, willing endeavour and good humour of a fine Executive. In particular, I might single out the contribution of Daniel Lamont, who this year steps down as Treasurer after many years of willing, committed, generous and skilful service. He deserves our thanks.

Rick Rylance

May 2001