

Council for College and University English

CHAIR'S REPORT 1998-1999

This year has continued to be a period of vigorous activity for CCUE. As a subject organisation with an increasing public profile, our work continues to reflect national developments in Higher Education. Given the current attention devoted to subject identity, in research and in teaching and learning, it is perhaps timely to remind members of CCUE's unique status as an organisation.

- Membership of CCUE is on an institutional not a personal basis. Delegates who attend meetings or who engage in our consultative processes speak on behalf of their departments or subject groups. They reflect departmental views and feed back to their colleagues. As a result CCUE is a genuinely collaborative and representative organisation which acts on behalf of the entire subject community.
- English is a large and diverse subject in HE but not one that has an explicitly vocational or professional affiliation. CCUE does not have the remit or jurisdiction of professional bodies in subjects such as Law, Engineering or Accountancy. In discussions with government agencies or other public bodies, it is vital that we engage in constructive dialogue in order to ensure the continuing health of our subject.
- Whilst opportunities for conferences on literary, linguistic and theoretical dimensions of our subject abound, CCUE remains the single most important forum for discussion of professional interests relating specifically to English in Higher Education. It is imperative that we facilitate this discussion in an open-minded capacity so that we can support new subject developments and strengths. In a climate where individual institutions are competing for resources, CCUE maintains a neutral position in order to defend all our members' interests.

Over the past twelve months, CCUE has responded to and been influential in shaping the changing HE agendas that impact upon our subject. Since the last AGM there have been five Executive committee meetings, one Ordinary General Meeting and a three-day Conference. Our activities can be divided broadly into three main areas.

1. Research

- The criteria for management of the next Research Assessment Exercise, published in September, incorporated CCUE recommendations made during the initial consultation. As mandated by the November OGM, CCUE submitted a list to HEFCE recommending 15 subject areas and 7 sub-areas to be considered by

the English Language and Literature panel in 2001. We submitted a list of 10 names to be considered for panel membership, bearing in mind the likely continuation of panel members who have not yet served two terms. We welcome the appointment of John Barnard as Chair of the panel.

- We welcome the establishment of the AHRB and continue to campaign for full research council status for the Arts and Humanities. Paul Langford, Chair and Chief Executive of the new Board, spoke at the OGM about AHRB policies and issues on which the Board seeks contribution from subject communities. We enjoy a positive relationship with the AHRB, and CCUE was well represented at the AHRB symposium held at the British Academy in April 1999.
- The Executive responded to the national consultation on the Research Libraries Support Programme, by requesting funding for regional collaborative activities and for bursaries for travel to special research collections. We identified special needs of the subject as including conversion of existing catalogues to electronic format. We also suggested that postgraduate students constitute a special user group in need of extra support.

1. **Subject Developments in Learning and Teaching**

- The 1998 AGM included a discussion with John Randall, Chief Executive of the QAA about revised processes for quality assurance, and the work of subject benchmarking groups in pilot subject areas. In December, Executive members attended a QAA conference for subject associations at which it was reported that, in line with our members' strongly expressed views, English Language and Literature will be seen as a discrete QAA subject area, and not be linked with American Studies. It seems that English will undergo subject assessment in the first round of the next quality assessment cycle (2000-2005) in England and Wales.
- The September conference devoted a series of sessions to debating pedagogic practice, including interdisciplinarity, assessment methodologies, creative writing, and the teaching of poetry. In line with renewed national interest and investment in HE learning and teaching, we are using the 1999 AGM as an opportunity to explore current projects in the discipline. HEFCE's recent initiative to establish subject centres to develop research into learning and teaching has aroused a great deal of attention, and we look forward to the HEFCE presence at the meeting to clarify the rationale for and the expected outcomes of such a centre in English.

1. **Qualifications and Curriculum Authority**

- In response to the enthusiasm of members at the 1998 AGM we have pursued contacts with QCA to strengthen the links between university English and the school curriculum. Executive members have acted as advisors on the protocols for the revised 'A' and 'A/S' Level syllabus, and have also attended a series of regional and specialist meetings. We continue to explore possibilities for joint publications

with QCA and others, including a collection of essays addressed to 'A' level teachers and sixth form pupils.

During the past year CCUE has forged and strengthened existing links with neighbour professional subject associations. We have maintained active contact with the UK-based History Universities Defence Group and the Standing Conference of Universities in Drama and Dance. We have also developed further links with the English Association, which has recently established a Higher Education sub-committee. Abroad, as well as maintaining representation on ESSE, we have initiated dialogue with our American counterpart, the MLA, on professional issues of mutual interest, including the employment prospects for postgraduate students in English and the nature of the undergraduate curriculum.

CCUE is fortunate in its Executive committee, which comprises members from seventeen UK institutions, including ancient, traditional, 'new' universities and colleges. The organisation would not survive without the energy and dedication of its Secretary, Rick Rylance, who shoulders much of CCUE's hard labour. I should like to thank the outgoing committee for their work, in particular Vincent Gillespie, who has hosted the AGM for the past two years, Daniel Lamont as Treasurer, Linden Peach as Assistant Secretary, David Punter for representing us on ESSE and Marion Shaw for organising the Conference. As Chair, I owe a great deal to the advice and support of the Executive members, who engage fully with current debates in the subject, and determine the direction of the association. CCUE general meetings now regularly attract delegates from over ninety institutions. It is a tribute to our standing and achievements that CCUE can command substantial respect both across the range of the academic community and from influential external agencies. I thank all of you for your support.

Judy Simons

23.4.99.