

COUNCIL FOR COLLEGE AND UNIVERSITY ENGLISH

CHAIR'S ANNUAL REPORT, 1999-2000

This has been a particularly active year for CCUE. As a subject association we aim to represent all Higher Education departments of English and our membership is based on departmental representation as opposed to individual subscription. Our mailing list includes 103 English departments and our meetings regularly attract an average of 100 delegates, a considerable advance on past years. This increased profile reflects the enhanced public face of the association and its activities.

In the oral report delivered at the OGM in December I alerted the membership to the changing nature of the association over the past three years and the way in which subject communities are now being actively involved in consultation processes and in decision-making by government agencies. The advantages of this approach are that as a subject community we are able to shape HE developments in the subject rather than merely react to government agendas. CCUE has played a central part in a number of recent initiatives, and has developed an effective public presence. At the same time the membership needs to recognise the increasing professionalisation of the role of the association and the implications for our position. We have a strong external profile but it is also important that we retain our academic integrity and independence in deciding which initiatives we take forward and how we act. I believe that this policy has been tested and proved successful this year in the following ways.

1. CCUE was heavily involved in consultation over the RAE and made vigorous representation to HEFCE about the management of the exercise. The new appointments to the RAE English panel were drawn almost exclusively from the proposals submitted by CCUE. In October we hosted a meeting at the British Academy for discussion with the chair of the panel, John Barnard, on the draft criteria for English. This was followed up with written recommendations to HEFCE, and we are pleased to note that the eventual published statement on criteria reflects members' concerns.

2. The QAA benchmark exercise drew heavily on CCUE's expertise, not just in the composition of the English benchmark group, which included several Executive members, but in its use of the data in CCUE's survey on the English curriculum published two years ago, and in utilising our networks. We circulated all member departments as part of an informal consultation process on the draft benchmark statement and the December meeting devoted a session to full discussion of the statement. The final statement, which is now published and was launched on 17 May, has taken into account all the points made by members.

3. At last year's AGM, there was heated discussion about the proposal from HEFCE regarding the establishment of Subject Centres to promote developments in learning and teaching. CCUE, alone amongst subject associations, took the view that we would not evaluate or endorse competing bids for an English Subject Centre from member institutions. After a complicated process of negotiation with HEFCE, it has now been agreed that the Subject Centre for English will be managed by the subject community in a unique partnership operation. The Centre will be based in London at Royal Holloway, with an I.T. 'arm' in the Centre for Computing in the Humanities at King's College. There will be a management committee, chaired by CCUE and with four places reserved for CCUE nominees. The post of Centre Director will be an independent appointment, openly advertised, as will the posts of the two Project Officers. This was a hard-fought battle, and we are grateful to Royal Holloway for hosting the Centre and managing its finances in this partnership capacity. We expect the Centre to start functioning in September.

In addition to these three main activities which have occupied much of our attention and will impact significantly on HE development in the subject, we have continued to liaise with the QCA regarding the new curricula for A and A/S level English. We have responded to the SHEFC consultation paper

on funding, and to the British Academy and AHRB on recommendations for research collections and library access for researchers, and on the use of the small research grants scheme. We have also maintained our links with other subject associations both in the UK and overseas, notably ESSE and the MLA. We continue to work with the Standing Council for Arts and Social Sciences (SCASS) and the Council for Deans of Arts and Humanities.

CCUE has now established itself as a real voice in HE. I believe, however, that there are still new directions in which the association can develop. Catherine Belsey at the OGM spoke compellingly about the need for a greater public understanding of English Studies, and I would hope that in future CCUE can take a lead in presenting our subject to a wider audience. There is also scope for extending our remit to help students and new entrants to the profession: hosting a postgraduate conference perhaps or sponsoring a prize for outstanding scholarship. It is a luxury granted to a retiring Chair to make these grand statements without any obligation to implement change. I am sure that the new Executive will have ideas of their own and I wish them every success in the future.

This is my third and final year as Chair of CCUE. I have been lucky in having the support of a strong Executive team. I should like to thank them all for their work on your behalf this year, and in particular Rick Rylance as Secretary, who has given exceptional service to the association. It has been a real privilege to have chaired CCUE through such an exciting phase in its history. I thank all members for your continued attention to the activities of your professional association and for your strong guidance on the issues we address.

Judy Simons

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