

CHAIR'S ANNUAL REPORT 2001-2002

It is customary that a Chair's report should review the year gone by rather than anticipate the year to come, but I wish this year to change the emphasis a little and invite colleagues towards the end of the report to consider what might be an eventful year to come.

Meanwhile, a good deal has happened in 2001-02. There has been the RAE most significantly; QAA has slouched a little further out of its corner and towards some sort of compromise on academic review enshrined in a number of explanatory documents which never quite declare themselves definite. (A favourite sentence in the most recent, advertised as an *Operational Description*, begins: 'At the same time total confidence can be placed in very little, certainly not the future ...'.) A good deal of consultation as well as hand-wringing has, of course, been generated by both. CCUE played its part as ever, responding to documents as required, attending briefings and meetings, and arguing for the proven success and integrity of the discipline. The British Academy and the AHRB, too, have been busy with reviews of their programmes of research and postgraduate support, and CCUE has actively consulted the subject community and made careful, detailed submissions in each case. The Research Libraries Support Group has required a similar contribution to its deliberations. Mike Rossington's contributions to all of these has been invaluable.

The Executive has also been assiduous is working with the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) on a range of issues. These include the subject specifications for English Literature and English Language at 'A' level and GCSE (where thanks are due to Lis Jay and Katie Wales), and the issue of comparability between the new 'A' levels with the international baccalaureate. CCUE has also sought an increasingly wide network of connections with cognate bodies to push forward important issues. With the English Association, NATE and others it has worked on the Common English Forum, a group dedicated to exploring a common agenda for English across a range of customary demarcation lines (school/university, literature/language, English and the growing domain of film, media and communication studies). With the Council for Deans in the Arts and Humanities (CUDA), the History in the Universities Defence Group (HUDG), and other subject associations, we have looked to common issues and concerns shared by the humanities in the new climate of higher education, pressing for improved treatment and appropriate respect. With CUDA and the British Academy, principally, CCUE is participating in the organisation of a number of events. Most prominent is one on the employability of humanities graduates. A headline conference at the British Academy, with supporting research findings, is planned in collaboration with the Council for Industry and Higher Education (CIHE), and with input from the national careers service and the Higher Education Statistical Agency (HESA) among others. At the OGM, members were addressed by Geoffrey Copland from Universities UK (UUK) on the work of that body.

The Council has also pursued discipline-specific concerns: a closer relation between the study of English Language and English Literature has been one, reflecting the importance of the study of both to the development of the subject. Here, discussions have been held with the English Language Forum (ELF) to promote the greater visibility of work on Language on CCUE's agenda. We have also looked steadily at the diversity of institutional and curricular provision in English across the UK with a keynote lecture on the relation between Scotland and 'English' literature by Robert Crawford at the OGM, and a panel discussion covering the whole of the UK at the AGM. In its day-to-day business, the Council has continued a very active engagement with the operation of the Subject Centre for English, managed its external evaluation, and provided a forum for contact between the Centre and the wider subject community. Chris Ringrose, as editor of *CCUENews*, produced another two excellent issues, and strong connections with ESSE have been maintained and enhanced by Vincent Gillespie.

But it is the future that inevitably concerns the Council most, and the year to come is likely to be critical. A glance at emerging issues is enough to make the point that the future is certain to be uncertain, as QAA realise. This summer sees the government's Comprehensive Spending Review in

which, ministers have touted, education has an opportunity to move forward, and in which the claims of higher education are well- understood. But will these claims be ignored again for those of, say, transport or health? If so, what is the likelihood for a peaceful, let alone an equitable, pay settlement? And what of the drive towards the target of 50% of young people entering HE by 2010? It is a target felt to be as remote and implausible by some as just pay, but its one which, alongside its twin – widening participation across the social classes – is certain to have a strong shaping force on the way English is taught and studied over the coming years.

This year has seen the ending of the MASN (the Maximum Aggregate Student Number), the mechanism operated for years by the funding councils to regulate intake into HEIs: if you under-recruited, your money was clawed back; if you over-recruited, you met the costs yourself. The MASN controlled the free market in students. But, after its abolition, will students congregate towards certain institutions and shun others with complex consequences for class sizes and work loads of an alarming kind. Either way, some colleagues may be in for difficult times. The funding councils are also committed to an infrastructural review, but there is general agreement that the RAE has been badly underfunded to the despair of most. The AHRB is looking to appoint a new Chief Executive to oversee the transition to a fully-fledged research council with closer relations to government (it is presently an independent charity), and possibly a place at the bigger feeding tables. And our friends in Gloucester, the QAA, with statutory deadlines looming will finally have to say what they mean and do something about it. And someone will have to pay.

The CCUE Executive met four times in the year 2001-2002. Its principal business was conducted by Vincent Gillespie as Vice Chair, Mike Rossington as Secretary, Lis Jay as Assistant Secretary, Linden Peach as Treasurer, and Judy Simons as Chair of the Subject Centre Management Board. I am grateful to all of these and to all other executive colleagues who willingly endured a thousand acronyms with constructive good cheer.

Rick Rylance (Chair)

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