

ENGLISH SUBJECT CENTRE

Bulletin

No. 1

October 2001

SUBJECT CENTRE EVENTS

We have the following events scheduled for the academic year 2001-2. Further events will be added in the course of the year. Booking forms and further details are available on our web-site: www.rhul.ac.uk/ltsn/english/events.... or e-mail esc@rhul.ac.uk

Plagiarism

Workshop: Plagiarism and Authority

When: 2nd November 2001, 10.30 to 16.00

Where: University of Liverpool

Delegates at this workshop will work to define plagiarism and to identify strategies for communicating effectively with students about the ethical issues and practical techniques involved in citation. Issues discussed will include the detection of plagiarism, the setting of assessment tasks and the design of handbooks, other resources and modules to help students to understand the issues at stake in the debate about plagiarism and citation. The event will include a demonstration of web technology designed to combat plagiarism from essay banks available on the web.

A Conference for those New to the Profession: 'The Teaching of English in Higher Education'

When: Friday 23rd and Saturday 24th November 2001,

Where: Birmingham Conference Park

This subject-specific conference is a two-day residential event intended for:

- recently appointed HE lecturers and tutors of English;
- postgraduates and others teaching part-time;
- those about to enter the profession or those recently qualified.

The conference will be highly participative in nature, and will offer ample opportunity for the formal and informal exchange of views and models of practice. The programme will also include guest speakers of national standing, including: Catherine Belsey, Sally Ledger, Susan Manning, Stephen Regan, Rick Rylance and Judy Simons.

E-learning in English: An English Subject Centre/Staffordshire University Workshop

Where: School of Humanities and Social Sciences, Staffordshire University, Stoke Campus

When: 9th November, 10.00 to 16.00

The English Subject Centre and Staffordshire University are co-sponsoring a one-day event on E-Learning in English. The event will begin with a general consideration of the implications of Virtual Learning Environments (VLEs) in English, including a consideration of the student experience of learning with VLEs. The event will then focus on two aspects of e-learning, generating and supporting online discussion in English Studies and assessing students' virtual learning. The day will consist of sessions that are part presentation/demonstration and part hands-on workshop.

Forthcoming Events

Although the English Subject Centre is a 'single subject' centre, many of the people who work in English departments would class their work as interdisciplinary. During the next twelve months, we will be setting up events in collaboration with other centres in the Learning and Teaching Support Network in order to reflect these interdisciplinary interests. We have already begun working with the Centre for Languages, Linguistics and Area Studies at Southampton (<http://www.lang.ltsn.ac.uk/>) and our first collaborative event will be held in London in February 2002. The event will revisit some of the issues discussed at the English Subject Centre's event on 'Seminars in Theory' (April 2001 – a report is available at: <http://www.rhul.ac.uk/ltsn/english/Events/Past/seminars.htm>). Delegates at the 'Theory in Practice' event will be invited to discuss the issues involved in teaching theory to students who have come in to higher education to study English, American or other literatures. In Newcastle, on 20th February 2002, we will be running a collaborative event which will introduce delegates to developments in uses of C&IT in literature and language studies. Details of these events will be publicised on the English Subject Centre website (<http://www.rhul.ac.uk/ltsn/english>). If you would like to suggest other ways in which the English Subject Centre can support interdisciplinarity, please contact us. (A full list of the LTSN Subject Centres is available at:

<http://www.ltsn.ac.uk/centres/centres/default.asp>)

PROJECTS, REPORTS AND OTHER ACTIVITIES

During the course of the year the Subject Centre will be undertaking a number of new projects and reports, with the aim of providing information and facilities to assist departments in planning, development and enhancement.

Study of Admissions Trends

The English Subject Centre has commissioned the Centre for the Study of Education and Training (CSET) at Lancaster University to produce a report on admissions trends in the undergraduate English population. The report will provide firm data on the levels of application to undergraduate courses.

The research will firstly investigate whether applications are declining as steeply as some sources suggest, and whether there is an accompanying fall in undergraduate numbers. The age and gender profile of English applicants will be analysed. Application trends in English will be compared with other subjects. UCAS and HESA data will be gathered and analysed.

The second phase of the research will involve primary data collection in schools and colleges in order to establish the attitudes which are currently informing subject choice amongst young people. About 500 questionnaires will be administered in a variety of types of school, and these will be supplemented by a smaller number of interviews. Some careers teachers and English teachers will also be interviewed.

We expect to have a final report in March 2002, and the results of the study will be disseminated to the subject community soon afterwards.

The English Degree and Graduate Careers

The recent history of the skills debate in English has been governed by the profession's well-founded belief that English graduates are well-equipped with a whole range of transferable skills, and accomplished in ways that demonstrate their flexibility. The strength of this position is nevertheless undermined somewhat in the articulation of these skills, which often does not distinguish English graduates greatly from many others. Further, while we are able to glean information from first destination statistics, there is no systematic analysis of such information that may further inform our sense of our graduates' employability, and little established liaison (beyond local arrangements) for the further consideration of the links between English graduates' abilities and the needs of employers. As vocational degrees gain a heightened profile, the considerable attributes of English graduates will need to be voiced with greater confidence.

The English Subject Centre intends to undertake some work on the relations between the English degree and graduate careers. The aims of this work are currently conceived as follows:

- To investigate the ways in which departments are currently profiling English graduates' attributes and skills;

- To discover the most valued attributes of English graduates for a range of employers;
- To identify the development of further skills in English programmes that are in developmental stages.

At this stage, the Centre is planning to commission a research project, the findings of which will provide a foundation of information from which individual departments might like to develop strategies. It is seeking consultation and advice on the design of the project, and ratification of its aims from members of the subject community.

The C&IT Project

In the last academic year the Subject Centre was successful in its bid for funds to run a project on the use and developments in Communication and Information Technology in English degrees. This year we are running the project, which will consist of a series of investigations into the current use, applications and capacities of IT in English in the UK. Our plans are to commence with the investigative work to discover what is being used, and how it is being used, and then to produce an annotated catalogue of facilities and programmes which we will make freely available to all departments. We will also run a series of regionalised events to demonstrate materials and discuss new developments and training opportunities. Our successful bid means that we will be employing an IT Assistant on the project for a year. To help guide our work, and focus the project's aims, we have assembled a group of experts in the field, all working in English Departments, with whom we will consult fully.

A Work Exchange Scheme for English

In our first Newsletter we mooted establishing an exchange scheme for English. The case for exchange schemes is that they offer a means of evaluating one's own practice as a teacher. They provide a new context in which to broaden one's range of professional experience, and stimulate reflection and analysis.

After some indications of interest from the subject community we are now examining models of how an exchange scheme might be set up and administered. Although aimed at UK-based English staff, a web-based service might well become international in coverage. The Subject Centre would not arrange exchanges itself. It would rather enable individuals to identify possible exchange partners, and try to provide answers to some of the many questions which may arise, or refer applicants to other sources of information.

The Exchange Scheme will be advertised on our website when it is up and running. If you have already made an exchange, successful or otherwise, we would like to hear from you.

Please contact: Jane Gawthrope, jane.gawthrope@rhul.ac.uk, 01784 414381

Directory of Experience and Expertise

Work has already begun on the English Subject Centre's Directory of Experience and Expertise (http://www.rhul.ac.uk/ltsn/english/Databases/Experience_Search.asp) The directory will help members of the English subject community to identify and consult with colleagues so that they can share experience and knowledge about specific aspects of teaching and learning. We expect all colleagues included in it to be in a position to advise colleagues about strategies for innovation (e.g. using oral assessment, e-mail discussion boards, problem-based learning) and/or strategies for strengthening traditional forms of support for students (e.g. handbook design, lecturing skills). The English Subject Centre will occasionally arrange and finance events which encourage other lecturers to benefit from contributors' experiences. People interested in being included in the directory should, therefore, be willing to contribute actively to discussions about teaching and learning in the discipline. In the first instance the English Subject Centre's Liaison Officer will be responsible for establishing whether or not colleagues are in a position to offer adequate support to lecturers who make contact with them. As the directory expands, the Subject Centre will increasingly make use of colleagues within the subject community who will be asked, on a critical friend model, to evaluate applications for inclusion in the directory. Enquiries about the directory should be directed to Dr Siobhán Holland (siobhan.holland@rhul.ac.uk) 01784 443218.

Part-Time Tutors in English

The recent NATFHE report into part-time teaching in higher education (*In From the Cold?*) confirms that part-time teaching provided by lecturers and graduate teaching assistants on fractional and hourly-paid contracts is on the increase. Many of us are or have been part-time tutors in English departments—others have been involved in working with part-timers—and we would like to invite people with an interest in good practice in this area to volunteer themselves as members of a focus group which will meet twice during this academic year. We extend the invitation to part-time tutors, graduate teaching assistants, lecturers with responsibility for liaising with part-time staff and other lecturers with management or 'teaching and learning' responsibilities.

The group will, we hope, discuss ways in which the English Subject Centre can

- provide useful support for part-time lecturers;
- help new part-time lecturers to benefit from the expertise and experience of other part-timers;
- identify and promote good practice in the support of part time lecturers;
- consider the impact of part-time teaching in terms of the broader cultures of teaching and research in English.

One of the recommendations of the NATFHE report is that part-time tutors should be able to make use of departments' staff development budgets, and we hope that part-time staff will be encouraged and funded to attend our events on a range of

topics as well as being provided with our newsletter. The Subject Centre will reimburse all focus group members for the time they commit to meeting with the Subject Centre. We would also like to hear from part-time tutors who would be interested in joining a mailing list for part-timers in English. For further details, please contact Dr Siobhán Holland siobhan.holland@rhul.ac.uk (01784) 443218.

Subject Centre Publications

The Centre is beginning work on a series of publications, principally short books on the teaching of the English curriculum, although other areas are also under consideration. We are particularly, but not exclusively, interested in publishing work on relatively new areas of the curriculum, and in covering all areas of such innovations, including resources, the availability of texts, interdisciplinarity, pedagogy, student response, and the informing of the curriculum by research and scholarship. As yet, this project is at a very early stage, and we would be pleased to hear from colleagues who would like to contribute.

International Conference

Planning continues for the International Conference, 'The Condition of the Subject' to be held in the summer of 2003. The conference will consider how English is both theorised and materially produced at the beginning of the 21st Century. It is clear that English has evolved rapidly over the last two decades, and its new forms, practices, and relations with other fields of intellectual activity have had profound effects on the understanding of its intellectual boundaries, challenging notions of subject knowledge, discipline, and conventional pedagogies. Currently the Subject Centre is discussing the form and content of the conference with partners, and it will be inviting colleagues from the subject community to assist planning, conception, and the organisation of the conference into strands and panels.

Consultation on Language and Literature

The Subject Centre is working with individuals and with the English Language Forum on the developments of English Language work, its relations with Literature Departments, and pedagogic practice. As a first stage, we are holding a consultation with a group of academics working in the field to discuss these relations and advise on future developments. In particular, we are concerned to support the work and the network of the forum, and to evolve ways of working with Language departments, as well as those Language specialists who work, sometimes in small groups, or even in isolation, within Literature departments.

¹ *In From the Cold? Part-Time Teaching, Professional Development and the ILT: a Union Learning Fund Project Lead by NATFHE* (London: NATFHE: The University and College Lecturers' Union, 2001)

CCUE

The next meeting of CCUE will be held on Saturday 8 December 2001 at Birkbeck College, London: notices of the programme will be sent to departments shortly.

English and the QAA

By now colleagues will all know that the projected programme for the review of English under the QAA new method has been suspended in England and Northern Ireland. Until a new agreement has been established between the QAA and the funding councils, the future is uncertain for these regions, although the signs currently seem to be that the favoured model will be one of institutional audit with some subject sampling. This has received a deal of publicity. Less well known is the fact that the new method of academic review will proceed as planned in Scotland, and that two English departments are scheduled for review in 2001-2. In Wales, the situation is different again: current plans are for the QAA to have 'engagement' with twenty-five institutions between January and July 2002, and within this, between one and three subjects will be reviewed in each case, the choice of subject being a matter of negotiation. There will also be academic review at the subject level in Further Education Colleges delivering HE programmes that are directly funded in England.

The future for England and Northern Ireland is the subject of a HEFCE consultation paper (01/45).

Issues in English

The English Association has launched a new pamphlet series with the above title. The first in the series is *Doctor! Doctor!: Doctoral Studies in English in Twenty-first century Britain*, comprising two essays by Annabel Patterson and Judy Newman. The publication looks at the case for restricting access to the doctorate and changing its structure. It also considers reasons why the traditional doctorate and its stringent standards should be retained, and questions whether it offers training for anything other than life as an academic. This pamphlet asks questions and canvasses solutions in the

hope of sparking off discussion in the higher education community at large, as well as in the circle of English studies.

Copies can be ordered from the English Association, The University of Leicester, University Road, Leicester LE1 7RH, at a cost of £5 each. (engassoc@le.ac.uk; www.le.ac.uk/engassoc/)

English and the Audit Culture, September 22nd, 2001.

This day conference was organised as a joint venture by the School of English, Cheltenham and Gloucester College of Higher Education, CCUE, and the Subject Centre. The conference was designed to reflect on the relations between the subject and the audit culture, addressing a range of pedagogical and intellectual challenges, as well as considering issues and claims of openness and accountability, while recognising troubling objectives behind such claims. Speakers included Robert Clark, Gary Day, Simon Dentith, Vivien Jones, Ben Knights, Daniel Lamont, Philip Martin and Catherine Neale.

This proved to be an interesting and lively day and the Centre will seek to make available some of the proceedings through the Newsletter and the website.

Future Newsletters

The next Newsletter (No. 3) will be published in January, and we welcome the submission of articles, opinions, letters and reviews. Articles can be from 300-2000 words on any aspect of the subject's teaching, learning, assessment and curriculum. We are particularly keen to receive items on the teaching of new areas in the curriculum, and innovations; equally we wish to solicit items concentrating on the teaching of particular periods, genre or authors. Newsletter No. 4 is likely to be a special issue, and the topic will be announced shortly.

If you have anything to offer for either issue, we would be pleased to hear from you. Please send articles and other contributions to: **Carol Eckersley, the Subject Centre Administrator, English Subject Centre, Royal Holloway, University of London, Egham, Surrey TW20 OEX or e-mail: esc@rhul.ac.uk**

English Subject Centre

Director:
Professor Philip Martin

Manager:
Jane Gawthrop

Project Officer (Academic Liaison):
Dr Siobhán Holland

Administrator:
Mrs Carol Eckersley

Project Officer (C&IT and Publications):
Dr Michael Hanrahan

MEMBERSHIP OF ENGLISH SUBJECT CENTRE COMMITTEES

The Subject Centre has the benefit of working with two committees, the Advisory Board (which advises on strategic issues and policy) and the Management Committee (which advises on operational matters). The membership of each, for 2001-2002, is given below:

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English Subject Centre, Royal Holloway, Univ. of London

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Royal Holloway, University of London

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University of Leeds

Professor Rick Rylance
Anglia Polytechnic University

Dr Shân Wareing
Royal Holloway, University of London

Harold Short
King's College, University of London

English Subject Centre

The English Subject Centre, Royal Holloway College,
University of London, Egham, TW20 0EX.

Tel: 01784 443221 Fax: 01784 470684

c.eckersley@rhul.ac.uk www.rhul.ac.uk/ltsn/english/