

English Subject Centre

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# Newsletter

Issue 4  
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**Students' Reading**  
Jo Gill and Alan Brown

**Marketing and Ghosts**  
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**The British Council**  
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# Editorial

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Professor Philip Martin, Director, English Subject Centre, Royal Holloway, University of London

Around a year ago, when the Subject Centre received its first independent evaluation from Professor Kelvin Everest, we were asked some interesting questions about how we were addressing that part of our brief covering learning. Teaching we might know about, but how do we address the learning side of the equation, and find out more, or investigate more purposefully, students' experience of the English degree? Our subsequent work has included considerably more of this dimension. We are currently engaged in a number of projects (the careers of English students and postgraduate research methods, for example) which investigate how students regard their work in the English degree. We ran a student essay competition, which asked entrants to reflect upon their experience of English in the round, and we have published Chris Thurman's winning entry in full in this issue, accompanied by extracts from the runner-up entries. Finally, we have requested student reviews of textbooks, and include three here as a starting point. We would be pleased to hear from departments with students who are willing to act in this capacity. These elements of current work should begin to piece together a fuller picture of how the English degree is perceived and regarded.

For the most part, the responses we are receiving in this area of our work are very positive, and perhaps we should not be surprised, since they are coming from able and enthusiastic students. We know, however, that this is not the whole of the student constituency nationwide, and this issue also sees an article ('Now Read This') which asks questions about the extent of students' reading, an article which chimes in readily with my own experience of meeting colleagues in departments around the country. There are concerns about how much students have read before they come to take their degrees, and indeed, how much they are reading in the duration of study. This is not to say, as the authors of this article point out, that only so much is enough, or that this is a derelict state of affairs. On the contrary, this is all about expectations, and the need to raise questions about the kinds of reading and literacies that students bring to their studies, and to acknowledge that we might need to think much more about this. Doubtless, there is a whole range of factors

to take into account. Selective departments may well be admitting enthusiastic and tireless readers, but not necessarily so, and not all departments enjoy this luxury; modular regimes have undoubtedly militated against the synthesis of reading, and tend to mark out reading against prescribed assessments (so what is the rest of it for?); the emphasis on skills, outcomes, learning objectives and specifications can so easily parody intellectual enquiry for its own sake into a redundancy or an irrelevance; the culture of reading itself is diminishing in many young people's lives even while it is expanding in other age groups. My own take on this is that we are also not very good at accrediting the reading experience itself, that the heavy hermeneutic of English might overstress what students can do over and above what they know, and that the coincidence of this approach with the skills agenda will continue to depress the importance of the prime activity of reading. However, such an analysis may have dangerously regressive tendencies, and requires a sophisticated understanding of subject knowledge to redeem it.

This topic is an urgent one for English, and we have therefore made provision on our new website, for a discussion to run under the title of this article. If you visit the new site ([www.english.ltsn.ac.uk](http://www.english.ltsn.ac.uk)) and go to the Discussion Board, you will find details of how to join in. Our new website has a much larger capacity than the first site, and has been designed for easy and quick navigation. You will notice that this newsletter has also been given a new look to relate it visually to our website and to keep it fresh and appealing to the eye. The website will become our main means of distributing materials to the community over time, and this coming year we will be concentrating more on the production of information and resources that will be of value to English tutors in their day-to-day lives. We are anxious to receive further suggestions about useful materials, so please let us know of your ideas and the usefulness of the resources we have developed.

This issue also includes Martin Coyle's memories of the TQA experience, a timely reminder of the bluntness of inspectorial instruments at a time when some English departments (those not visited last time, together with degree programmes or part programmes

in FE Colleges) it now appears, are experiencing subject review again. As the Scottish system, as reported in the last issue, continues to refine its model of enhancement and partnership, we should recognise the strengths of such an approach and the serious regard it has for improvement and support. In a separate article, Martin Coyle also outlines some radical proposals for reforming, grading and classification, developed out of his reflections on the strong clustering of upper second classifications nationally, and the ways in which such bulking can disguise the range of abilities therein. We look forward to responses on these proposals too. Recently we held a consultation for external examiners in English, with a view to discovering what kinds of valuable information and recommendations could be gleaned from such a group at a time when the system seems set to change, and the External's role enlarged. Our discussions ranged widely, and included some of the issues that Martin raises. We are currently writing up the event into the form of a report, and further details are given in this issue.

Two articles in this issue are justly congratulatory in tone. Professor Rick Rylance outlines the successes of English and the strength of its current position nationally. He rightly points out that we are not always our own best advocates, particularly in terms of putting the case for funding, and recognising the role our subject plays in educating people who subsequently make large contributions in cultural and civic life, as well as in the creative industries, the arts, and education. Dr Sean Matthews writes in praise of the work undertaken by the British Council in supporting colleagues teaching literature and cultural studies overseas, particularly in middle and eastern Europe. His informative piece is also a reminder to us of the importance of the Bologna Declaration (outlined by Graham Caie in our last issue), and the need to work more closely with colleagues in Europe in the future, and it also coincides with a recent call from Stephen Greenblatt, in the Modern Language Association newsletter, to found an 'e-mail academy', a virtual network of resources and discussion with a global reach. Rick Rylance and Sean Matthews call for us to look outward, positively, at the potential and the

future, and the Subject Centre is well-positioned, I think, to respond and will do so. We have started to develop our links with the British Council, the European Society for the Study of English and the Modern Language Association, and we expect those to begin to move beyond exchange of information into more collaborative work; we also have the capacity to provide data, information, and argument for departments on the kinds of value that English and the cognate disciplines provide.

Much of the Subject Centre's work this past year has been to gather and analyse opinions and information in the form of reports: on C&IT in English, admissions, creative writing, access and widening participation, part-time teaching, external examining, the employment of English graduates, and postgraduate research methods. The Admissions Report has been distributed; many are close to completion now and will be distributed to departments this autumn, and the remainder will follow in quick succession. We have also launched our large-scale survey of Departments' work under the title 'Survey of the English Curriculum and Teaching in UK Higher Education'. This will follow up on the only such survey previously conducted, *Diversity and Standards* (CCUE, 1997), and should produce a mass of interesting material for departments about how English is taught and constructed in curricula across the country.

# Articles

## What will English be?

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**Rick Rylance is Professor of Modern English Literature and Dean of the School of Arts and Letters at Anglia Polytechnic University. He is the current Chair of the Council for College and University English (CCUE). Here he gives an extensive survey and consideration of the future of English in higher education.**

What are the forces that shape English in Higher Education today and how will they create the subject in the future? I want to call attention to certain circumstances that are likely to have major formative consequences. But the context of the discussion is set by the urgent demand, in the current higher education environment, for legitimation. Whether this is registered in terms of research rating, or the verdicts of audits of various kinds, or a sense of intellectual and educational authority, the present climate demands a strong story. And it is notorious in many circles that the Arts and Humanities are weak in self-explanation, especially in terms of public understanding. I think the most urgent task facing the subject just now is the need to create a powerful, persuasive narrative of our role and place in the culture for an audience of more than ourselves. To do so, we need to understand something of what is happening beneath our feet in the discipline's operation. What follows are a series of notes to that end. It is only a beginning.

A common image of English is that it is an agglomeration of parts – even, in extreme versions, a fissiparous non-subject, spawning itself through its fragmenting bits, and perpetually, even gleefully ‘in crisis’. Why we should feel the need to be ‘in crisis’, or to declare our non-existence as a coherent intellectual discipline, is beyond me – though I suppose it might be better than being in torpor. Perhaps the reasons for our eager sense of crisis lie in the embattled temper of the modern history of the subject, including its frequent proximity to ideological enthusiasm and social jeremiad. Or it may originate in an heroic and not unworthy wish to establish a critical centre for intellectual life in an uncongenial culture. For whatever reason, we have had our turn at enjoying an imaginary tidal wave in our disciplinary goldfish bowl.

However, there is another way of telling this story, not as a narrative of disciplinary entropy, but of steady and forceful convergence. We have been occupied with issues of sincere intellectual, methodological and political disagreement, to be sure. But there is also a strong capacity within the subject for the integration of activity that (at least initially) is spikily oppositional. The awkward edges may be rubbed off in the process of attachment, but in reality we work within accommodating structures and a disciplinary culture shaped by agile adaptability. Just now, for instance, there seems a cosy corner in all syllabuses where a course on ‘transgression’ can nestle. This too is forever English.

A survey of the higher education curriculum in English conducted by CCUE in 1997 was based on detailed responses from 70 institutions across the UK, which is about 70% of the whole provision.<sup>1</sup> It revealed few major differences in curricular aims and outlooks within the subject community, even across the divide between ‘old’ and ‘new’ institutions. On the contrary, there was ample evidence of a strong sense of consistency and stability of attitudes. This was expressed in course formats that consistently emphasised, for instance, teaching a generous range of writing in terms of period and kind, the ubiquitous importance of context for the study of both literature and language, a stress on the significance of self-reflection and an understanding of theoretical assumptions, and a tolerance – indeed promotion – of diversity of approach and outlook. Some individual institutions were different, and some general differences were revealed across small groups of institutions. There were also some regional disparities (especially in Scotland). But – important region-specific issues aside – the most significant structural variance was resource-led. A thinner resource base, in some ‘new’ institutions and colleges especially, inevitably leads to smaller staff

groups, a more compressed curricular range, larger class sizes, scantier libraries and fewer opportunities. Nonetheless, the compelling overall picture was one of substantial commonality of purpose. Little in the data disturbed the conclusion that, despite sporadic disputes about 'theory', ideology, issue agendas, methodology or the compulsory teaching of Anglo-Saxon, we appear a relatively settled discipline with convergent norms and expectations.

Why is it important to emphasise this? It is important because a preoccupation with constitutional disputes (weighty though these often are) can distract us from factors shaping our situation from without. I believe that the pressures determining the nature of our subject over the next twenty years will largely come from external developments and not from those internal to a discipline which has proved itself resourceful in introducing and promoting new ideas. I also believe that whatever accommodating consensus there may be, could be revised under pressure from the factors indicated below. So here are four observations about the evolving base of the subject that strike me as important. They are not ranked in order of significance, and their effects will be felt differentially. They are certainly not exclusive, and they are not, I think, 'problems' in any formal sense. They are a set of structural conditions to which more or less satisfactory responses will emerge in the event. I should be glad to hear from colleagues about how the list might be enlarged or amended. CCUE is very conscious of the need to press the claims and achievements of the subject in all relevant fora.

## Admissions

A recent study of admissions to HE English, commissioned by the English Subject Centre, and written by Sadie Williams of the University of Lancaster, made cheerful reading.<sup>2</sup> It concluded that recruitment to English was steady and, on this evidence, one might infer that it is unlikely to decline from present high levels. The subject by and large recruits very able students and is perceived as prestigious by parents, teachers, schools and employers. In addition, we might note that about

90,000 students take English 'A' level each year which makes it, with Mathematics, the largest specialist subject on offer. (General Studies is larger, but this is a special case.)<sup>3</sup> There seems little evidence of the structural weaknesses to which some neighbour disciplines, particularly languages, are now exposed.

However, we might also note, within this broadly healthy picture, certain subterranean movements. Global numbers have been sustained. However, because almost all institutions wish to increase student intake for financial reasons, shifts in recruitment volume between institutions are appearing. The 'market share' of some is increasing, that of others declining. In some cases, this population shift exposes smaller or less prestigious departments. Among those losing out, there will understandably be a wish to be distinctive, maybe to specialise in certain directions, or to elide the particularity of English by studying broader ranges of material. The shifts in the intellectual constitution of English over recent years to embrace broader modes of cultural criticism provides a rationale and an opportunity. The economics of recruitment provides the engine.

In addition, there also appear to be changes in the intellectual orientation of applicants. For instance, within that annual cohort of 90,000, a large, increasing proportion – now over 20% (or 20,000) – are not studying literature exclusively, but either literature and language or language alone. In addition, some cognate subjects like drama and film, communication and media studies are showing proportionally significant growth. These of course overlap with, or butt very directly onto, the domain of English. Sadie Williams study suggests that these increases are not occurring at the expense of English. Nonetheless, it is easy to see a connection between this and a general modification in the culture towards visual, virtual or performative representations. This development is bound to ask taxing questions of a discipline oriented primarily towards the study of written text, and which uses the conventionally structured academic essay as its dominant form of communication. The recent growth of creative writing might be understood as one aspect of a general wish to be active creators or performers rather than sober analysers of meaning.

But we must be very careful not to conflate different trends of a complex problem. The move towards the study of language or language and literature is hardly a step away from patient analysis. But it is one that may have an interestingly gendered element. Still perceived by many males as a 'feminised' subject, 'traditional' English recruits about 7 female students to 3 male. This ratio stays remarkably consistent both over time and in the transition from school to university. But the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) and others have speculated that the study of language may be attracting proportionally more male students than female, so the move towards language may also come to represent a movement in the gender composition of the subject. It may represent an opportunity to attract more men to English, especially when it can be allied to computing, as Sadie Williams among others notes. The day of the Engleek may be at hand.

There are other points to be made about admissions. Like most subjects English is now attracting significantly greater numbers of students than 20 years ago, and, if the government's 'widening participation' policy succeeds (as I, for one, hope it will), it is likely to attract yet more. Inevitably, this will extend not only the ability range of those arriving in higher education, but also the cultural context from which they arrive. This in turn may be in some indirect relationship to an appetite for examining cultural forms other than literature, and for articulating findings in forms different from that of the traditional essay. The impact of these developments and the inevitable continuing enlargement of the subject in terms of both content and protocols for its study are, over time, very significant indeed. As is the following development.

If the government's widening participation policy is successful, the potential number of new students created is very large. Though this figure is not uncontested, it is estimated by the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) to be about 350,000, which is the equivalent of about 15 large universities. What is entirely unclear, however, is where these people will be accommodated. English will presumably take its share, but the framework of the present 3-year system, let alone the constraints of infrastructure and staffing, makes it probable that these

students will be in a different relationship to the subject and its current institutions. Perhaps more students will be taught in further education institutions, perhaps more will be part-time, perhaps more will study for sub-degree level awards, perhaps more will move into classes on an occasional basis without a continuing commitment to the whole syllabus. (The government's service level agreement on widening participation promises only that 50% of young people will have the **experience** of higher education, not the full monty.) Maybe English won't attract many such students, though that seems unlikely as well as undesirable. Either way the scale of the possible numbers, and their particular needs and interests, could reshape the demographics of the subject, our sense of the type of institution in which it is taught, the relationships between colleagues teaching different things in different parts of the system, even the shape of what constitutes a curriculum appropriate to the study of English in higher education. The current broad consensus about what constitutes the English syllabus will come under major structural pressure.

As a weather-watcher, I sometimes see a nasty patch of gloom swirling around English. English, as well as being 'in crisis', is said to be imminently redundant: the Classics of the twenty-first century – old and arcane, fallen among the few, of little interest to the many. This Larkinesque view has little evidence (and even less appeal) to commend it. It is foolish and crude. The complex dynamics of the way the infrastructure of the discipline is developing suggest no such conclusions. They do present an emerging picture that is both complicated and potentially enriching. Amongst the invitations the situation issues is one to engage fully with the changing patterns of cultural interest rising before our eyes, and the social relationships into which these are embedded. That this might be thought to be incompatible with the 'traditional' study of language and literature is, like the idea of perpetual crisis, beyond me.



## Economics as policy

Among the depressing features of modern higher education is the quiet acceptance of the fact that the revenue brought by the education of each student falls below real costs. The operational assumption is that institutions will close the gap by supplementing fee and Funding Council income from other sources. Some of these sources can, to some degree, lie unevenly within an institution's control, like revenue derived from entrepreneurial services. Other money is derived from centrally administered competition in modified or direct forms, of which the Research Assessment Exercise (RAE) is the best known but far from singular example. The present argument about differential fee pricing is part of this problem which follows from the negative side of Mr Micawber's famous economic nostrum: 'Annual income twenty pounds, annual expenditure nineteen nineteen and six, result happiness. Annual income twenty pounds, annual expenditure twenty pounds ought and six, result misery.' At present, Micawber University – as well as many better-run institutions – is heading for misery.

A consequence of this financial system of endemic structural inadequacy supplemented by non-dependable additions is the creation of a powerful instrument of policy. Financial mechanisms are used to secure desired changes or inflect behaviour. If one is prone to be suspicious of centralised agendas, then the danger lies not in dirigiste curriculum specifications (which nutcase would wish to take on that job?), or increasingly superficial audits of 'quality' in various spheres, but in the cunning use of financial incentives and restraints to achieve objectives. The discussion of these is carefully constrained within the restricted protocols of formal 'consultations' on particular initiatives in the form of responses to HEFCE and other documents with pre-set agendas and narrow, frequently inconvenient timeframes.

At subject level, financial making-do is increasingly dependent on obtaining, and then trying to continue, competition-based funds for limited periods of time. Once again the RAE is the clearest example, but

increasingly extra-institutional bodies like the research charities and the Arts and Humanities Research Board (AHRB) sustain the research infrastructure. The latter, for example, has proved itself an excellent organisation in my view. But the research efforts of many departments are now to a degree dependent on success in its competitions. In many institutions, sabbatical applications are conditional on a joint bid to the AHRB for matched leave. And postgraduate work at significant levels is almost entirely contingent on the Board's distribution of its meagre funds. Meanwhile, the AHRB itself is deliberating – very sensibly thus far – on the virtues and vices of a more directive approach to the research it funds. Should it simply respond to quality research ideas as they emerge, come what may? Or should it take a more 'strategic' approach to forming some part at least of the research agenda by pushing money in specified directions? The AHRB is very far indeed from a dirigiste organisation, but the issue of its strategic influence is clear in all aspects of its deliberations.

It may be said that a similar situation does not pertain to teaching. But, though the proportional volumes are different, funds are being made available regularly for particular initiatives, and departments have to dance, a little gracelessly at times, to tunes played elsewhere to attract money at the margins for the development of teaching. As widening participation initiatives are unveiled, there will be little surprise if the carrots and the sticks with which they are embellished are not used in similar ways.

Again, why is this important? It is so for several reasons: because the idea of the relatively autonomous academic entity is looking more and more antique; because departments, or rather their managers, have increasingly to wise-up to these strategic ploys and thus inflect the tone of a department's business; because the reduction in core funding correlates very closely with the appalling relative decline in academic salaries and greater use of temporary, contract or part-time staff; and because an escalating amount of our time is being spent, as scientists have long known, in the pursuit of grants, awards, audits and paper-keeping of various sorts. All of these are profoundly influential on the constitutional vigour of the subject.



### Vocationalism

As well as being ‘in crisis’, gloomily defunct in Larkin’s manner, and above all poor, English is useless – right? And because it is useless in life’s rough task of getting a job, students are turning away from it – right? Wrong, on all counts.

We have seen that Sadie Williams’ report finds no evidence of seriously declining demand. And we know that the subject is adaptable in its intellectual demeanour, and speedy and responsive to new ideas and materials. It also, the evidence suggests, has little trouble in placing its graduates in employment. And yet the pernicious myth persists that English is grossly ill equipped as a subject for sensible, career-minded adults.

I have had my say on this nonsense before. I object to it on the twin grounds that it misrepresents the real facts of employment patterns, proportions and destinations for Humanities graduates, and that it confuses education with training and with it the purposes of higher education.<sup>4</sup> But the problem will certainly not go away. It is therefore necessary to keep banging on about it for at least three good, strong reasons: because the myth of unemployability tells lies about us and does us harm; because we need to contest the stupidity entailed in much of the debate about vocationalism as a lead goal of higher education; and because our students need to know about the issues, and about how to respond to the problems, real and mythological, in getting their jobs. The way the debate is now constituted is myopic and ill informed. But this does not mean that we can ignore it in what we do, or in elaborating our powerful story about what English is.

### The emerging generation

Alongside changes in the student profile, and in the allocation and distribution of resources, the past two decades have seen sharp changes in the way we think about new entrants to the profession. In the recent past, the surmise has been that new staff will become gradually acculturated into the academic community through a research apprenticeship. Doing a PhD

brought you within the mystery by osmosis and set you forth on a career. This, of course, has changed, just as the professional expectation that one would obtain a PhD replaced the assumptions of an earlier generation whose recruitment (if anecdotal evidence is to be credited) appears to have depended on a network of largely Oxbridge-derived contacts and the reputation for being clever. Even now a PhD is far from sufficient; rather, it is taken for granted, like A levels. To fight for a job one must publish early, have some teaching experience, ‘network’, be distinctive, demonstrate some aptitude for ‘becoming a professional’. The word ‘professional’, indeed, now seems to replace ‘academic’ as a defining job descriptor (as we now say), partly because ‘academic’ cannot shed its associations with wild-haired irrelevance.

In short, for young, new colleagues we assume a developed career orientation, focus, a significant, early degree of specialisation, and fast, regular achievement. Then, on appointment, the productivity really begins. You can become a certificated teacher through the Institute for Learning and Teaching (ILT), and perhaps that does someone some good, and (if your institution is geared this way) you join the race for research productivity, often with excellent results. Much of this is positive. But it does represent a major change in ethos and puts a considerable burden on young colleagues. It also foreshortens the planning horizons of departments who, because funding is both scarce and unreliable (see above), find it increasingly difficult to think beyond the short-term and seriously invest in the future. With colleagues at full stretch, I worry about eating up intellectual reserves, and thereby not allowing the future to mature in the present.

We are now not only a much more pressured profession, we are one much more ruthlessly exposed to public scrutiny. Traditionally, we have been remarkably ignorant of each other: of what goes on in colleagues’ classrooms, in those in the institution down the road, in the institution that is a short step across the old binary line, in the institutions grouped in our region, in what happens in other subject domains. We now need to become more actively curious, because we cannot make the mistake of assuming that English or any other discipline can stand alone. Nor that our

engagement with the world beyond our small round of corridors is merely a matter of ensuring that some audit outfit or another periodically stamps our passport cleanly.

It is hard to feel well disposed towards the regimes of audit that now dominate the life of public institutions. It is hard to feel pleasure in the Quality Assurance Agency's mission to become the profession's super-ego. It is hard not to feel other than enraged by the funding famine and unplanned, vicissitudinous growth, or to feel suspicious of the use of mechanisms of resource distribution as instruments

of policy. And so on. But it is also not to be deplored that education should have both a more substantial and more visible public presence. Some of this attention, at the moment, is negative, like sporadic moral panics about 'standards'. But if half of the population is to enjoy the benefits of higher education within the lifetime of many of us, then that process of gain in communal presence is a rich opportunity. And it is so not least for a subject such as ours which claims to contribute significantly, as both commentator and maker, to the quality of that culture's well being. We will suffer large costs if we respond badly.

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<sup>1</sup> Vincent Gillespie, Rick Rylance and Judy Simons, *The English Curriculum: Diversity and Standards. A Report Delivered to the Quality Assurance Agency, (Dec. 1997)*. A copy of this report was sent to all UK English departments. The English Subject Centre, with CCUE, is conducting a second survey (see page 3 of this Newsletter) to update these findings five years on, and it will be exceptionally interesting to see whether the picture has much changed.

<sup>2</sup> Sadie Williams, *Admissions Trends in Undergraduate English: Statistics and Attitudes* (LTSN English Subject Centre, 2002).

The report is available at [www.english.ltsn.ac.uk/resources/topic/admissions.htm](http://www.english.ltsn.ac.uk/resources/topic/admissions.htm) or in print from the Centre.

<sup>3</sup> This and subsequent data about 'A' Level is derived from briefings by the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA).

<sup>4</sup> Rick Rylance, 'Brains in their Tales', *Times Higher Education Supplement*, 28 March 1997; Rick Rylance and Judy Simons, 'The Really Useful Company: Graduates, Employment and the Humanities', *Critical Quarterly*, 43 (2001), 73-78.

Dr Jo Gill of the University of the West of England and Dr Alan Brown of the University of Gloucestershire raise some fundamental questions about what, and how much, students of English read.

The English Subject Centre has set up a number of innovative projects to enhance the subject. These include work to monitor and broaden the 'English' curriculum, to foster widening participation, to promote literacy, to spread good practice in creative writing courses, and to develop effective virtual learning environments. We want to add another topic to this list – one which takes us back to some very basic questions about the subject, the teaching environment, and the unwritten assumptions which circulate between students and lecturers.

What do students of English read? What do they read 'for pleasure', and what do they expect to read as part of an English degree? This is partly a question about the types – the genres, authors, subject matters – of reading, but it is also, to put it crudely, a question of *how much*.

Anecdotal evidence from colleagues across a range of institutions (new universities and old) suggests that a significant number of students are reading less (fewer texts, shorter texts, less demanding texts) than we might expect, and less than they may need to participate fully and to succeed – in the broadest sense – in higher education. We start from the premise that this issue has been exercising teachers in the field for some time. It raises a number of questions and speculations which we hope to pursue with colleagues through the English Subject Centre. How important is reading to the undergraduate study of English? Should its function and centrality be newly and explicitly stated? Do we need to redefine and defend the importance of reading, as such, in the course of an English degree? Is the ability and inclination to read an attribute which we have taken for granted till now, and is it necessary to support and/or monitor it?

If 'resistance to reading' turns out to be an issue of subject-specific concern, then other questions follow. Is it the case, as some anecdotal evidence suggests, that students in other fields (History, Women's Studies, for example) view reading as a primary means of gaining information and thus accept the demands of time and effort which it requires? Why do a number of students in the 'English' degree express concern over the reading requirements of their courses? Is it the role of lecturers

to make clear at an early stage the amount, the type, and above all, the purpose of reading? Do we need to make our expectations and commitments more clear?

Have changes in GCSE and A/S Level courses influenced students' habits and expectations as regards reading? Are 'widening participation' strategies an issue here, in terms of the need for renewed clarity in setting down our assumptions? What effects might modularisation have had on students' reading practices? Some colleagues suggest that students who take specialist options are, in general, more committed in their reading, and more successful in terms of assessed outcomes. Does this offer a way forward, or is it capitulation to the market?

Our project does not represent the 'Angry of Tunbridge Wells' school of enquiry. It is not premised on assumptions about 'the youth of today'. Indeed, it recognises that if there is found to be a falling-off in some students' commitment to reading in higher education, this may not mean that they read less, but, for example, that they may be reading different things. Are our interests as academics in the field of literature diverging from those which students bring to the dialogue? Should we be offering more creative choices and agendas here?

Certainly, there is an argument that, to an as yet undefined extent, reading habits and expectations are shifting in our field. Our aim would be to evaluate this argument constructively, initially by sharing experiences through the English Subject Centre's interactive messageboard on its website: <http://www.english.ltsn.ac.uk/discussion/index.htm>. We would like to invite contributions from colleagues setting out their views on the reading habits of students, and on the factors which encourage and inhibit reading. We would also hope to start a discussion on successful strategies which colleagues may have used in this area.

In the first of two articles for this Newsletter, Dr Martin Coyle, Chair of English Literature at Cardiff University, offers a personal reflection on marking ranges.

For years I have resisted using the full mark range. It might be possible in Mathematics or Chemistry or even darts to award students a mark of 100, but surely not in English. There is, indeed, something vulgar about going even above 80, and why would one? How could one decide between 82 and 83, for example, or 88 and 89? It's easy enough to see the difference between 69 and 70 – external examiners do it all the time – but once we move beyond 79 the air gets very thin.

Or that's what I used to think. I've begun to have doubts not because I can now judge what an 88 essay might be like but because of grade inflation. More specifically, inflation in the numbers of students gaining upper second class degrees – I admit this may be more of a problem in some departments than others – means that we are fast approaching an absurd situation where we spend hours marking hundreds of essays and scripts only to give them the same overall classification. We might think we are making fine judgements as we debate whether the answer is a 64 or 65, but the reality is that in many cases it makes not a jot of difference. The student will get an upper second, and if he or she doesn't quite make it, the exam board will seek to find the extra mark, or a special case will be made, or the external will be asked to rule.

None of this might happen if we abandoned classification, but that is unlikely to happen quickly. And it certainly won't happen while we employ the kind of limited mark range that is found in most universities. The 40/70 range is so common that it hardly needs glossing, but it is worth noting how it has come to have a kind of mystique all of its own. Just 31 marks separate failure from a first, the lowest from the highest. It would be difficult to imagine how the scale might be more compressed. Even harder is how to explain why a first, in theory at least, can be anything from 70 to 100. Why, indeed, is the first class given 30% of all the marks available, while the upper second has only 10% of the marks? The sums get even dizzier when we realise that up to 80% of all students are judged against 10% of the marks.

A number of paradoxical points start to emerge when you start to play with figures in this way. First, whatever its merits, the traditional marking scale of

40/70 is no longer serving a clear purpose. It is no longer, that is, allowing the identification of any kind of real discrimination between performances. The increase in student numbers is perhaps one factor behind this. Once you begin to have hundreds of students all gaining a similar degree, the exercise of marking becomes not one of difference but of sameness. At the same time, the collective pressure to police the first class boundary inevitably means that there is a holding down of marks in the 60–69 band. And then there is inertia. We are so battered with change that clinging to the old mark scheme gives us a sense of still belonging to the world of scholarship and learning that we once knew, a kind of golden age before TQA, RAE and all that.

But change I think we must. Quite how I haven't yet managed to work out, partly because I don't really have a mathematician's sense of the elegance of numbers. 40/70 seems to work because it moves gradually from the pass at 40 through the third at 45 and then into a balance between the lower and upper second before opening out into the spaciousness of the first range. But, as we know, the balance that kept first and third apart has gone. The crowds that gather under the upper second threaten to destroy both the lower second – for some reason, the third lingers longer – and the first. If this analysis is correct, then the problem lies with the upper second and that whatever mark scheme we might move to should deal with that problem above all else. In other words, we need a mark scheme that will correct the system rather than a mark scheme for grading performances.

The logic here may seem more than a little perverse, but I am simply suggesting a kind of economic correction or intervention in the market before it collapses entirely. And the place to intervene is the upper second category by giving it proper emphasis in the marking system. Briefly, I propose that we do, indeed, use the full mark range, but not quite in the naive way that educationalists have maintained, that is, by marking the firsts with extra high marks between 70 and 100. That will merely compound the problem as markers start to regard 70–72 as a borderline, with 'proper' firsts starting at 75. This is not the answer: it will simply stoke up inflation.

No, instead I think we should start to extend the upper second category so that it embraces a set of divisions all of its own. We can still have 40 as the pass and 45–49 as third class. And then 50–59 can still be lower second. What we need with the upper second is something like a low, middle and high upper second, perhaps with marks 60–69, 70–79, and 80–85. The exact numbers here are quite hard to determine for reasons I outlined above – there must be a kind of symmetry and balance, but the proportions are, I am sure, right. The three lower classes – pass, third and lower second – are balanced by three upper grades, while the first remains slightly aloof and out of sight.

With a system of lower, middle and high upper seconds we immediately provide our students with a broader set of differences than they have now while maintaining the fiction of getting an upper second. But such a system also keeps the 70 marker in play so that it will be some time before grades do regularly climb into the 70s and 80s as genuine upper second marks. It is only once that happens – perhaps another five to ten years – that there will be a move towards dropping classification and using the marks on transcripts. The paradox here is that by strengthening the system before it collapses we establish the possibility of transcripts. But a new marking system will also buy time to adjust the degree process to include yet more students. Widening access is about more than bums on seats.

Using the full mark range means using marks more fully to achieve diverse purposes. The marking system is a powerful instrument that has enormous power over students, but it can also enable the profession to re-establish its grip over standards and quality in a way undreamt of by the QAA. It will become possible to give very high and very low marks without seeming to be insane. Initially it may mean having to think about marks in categories – is this a low, middle or high upper second? – but that seems a small price to pay to bring inflation under control. The real gain, however, is that eventually we will be able to give marks that distinguish between the achievements of students rather than lumping them together endlessly in the 60/69 band. The second was once undivided, so that we would be merely following good practice and tradition by dividing the upper second. QED.

### **New website for academic staff supporting disabled students**

**Mike Wray**

Academic staff are under pressure to ensure that their teaching and assessment methods are inclusive of disabled students as new anti-discrimination laws come into force in September 2002. The Special Educational Needs and Disability Act (SENDA 2001) asks higher education institutions to make ‘reasonable adjustments’ in their provision for disabled students, otherwise they could face the embarrassment of departmental staff defending themselves in court in full view of the media. However, information specifically aimed at teaching staff can be hard to find and therefore the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) has funded special initiatives over the last two years to address some of the staff development issues that disability produces. The Demos Project is a collaborative project based in the four universities in the Manchester and Salford area. The project has investigated ways of providing information on the web for teaching staff using online learning approaches wherever possible. Information is currently available on the following three topics:

- w admissions of disabled applicants to higher education
- w students with dyslexia in higher education
- w assessment and examination regulations

Three further topics will be available towards the end of the summer:

- w teaching and learning issues
- w disability awareness
- w legislation: compliance with SENDA for academic staff

Each resource is packed with links to other sites of interest on the web so it is hoped people will return to them as a reference source whenever necessary.

Other highlights on the website will include:

- w interviews with disabled students
- w externally commissioned work including work by disabled students

Information:

- w group work
- w teaching disabled students on large foundation year programmes

For further information about the project please contact: Mike Wray, Project Coordinator, tel: 0161 247 3377 fax: 0161 247 6852 minicom: 0161 247 3492 email: [m.g.wray@mmu.ac.uk](mailto:m.g.wray@mmu.ac.uk) or simply check out the website [www.demos.ac.uk](http://www.demos.ac.uk)



**Dr Sean Matthews, Lecturer in Contemporary Literature at the University of East Anglia, discusses the changing role of the British Council, looking at its work in support of the subject community in the UK and abroad, and reports from the major, Council-sponsored, regional conference in Budapest, 'Transmissions: Theory, Research and Teaching in British Literary and Cultural Studies in Europe'.**

The British Council still makes people suspicious. Where its image in the UK is not mired in the never-never lands of Malcolm Bradbury and David Lodge (sex, money, a whiff of gentlemanly corruption), it is the victim of an historical association with the murky diplomatic hinterland of honorary consuls, cultural attachés and (worse) well-meaning High Table amateurs. More recently, post-colonial critics suspect it of cultural supremacism and intellectual imperialism, whilst traditional liberal intellectuals worry about an increasing strategic commitment to language schools and other commercial projects, a function of the division of its responsibilities between the generation of income and the promotion of Britain in the world.<sup>1</sup>

Yet few of our public institutions are, in fact, less deserving of their current reputation, especially where the further/higher education literature sector is concerned. The Council has long enjoyed a unique status beyond the British Isles, influencing and advancing cultural policy and exchange in dynamic and frequently unexpected ways. In recent years, particularly through the work of its Literature Department, it has initiated and supported numerous projects of enduring significance, consolidating – as anyone involved in these activities will testify – a position of weight and significance in the non-UK English subject community.<sup>2</sup>

Progressive reforms at home and abroad have changed the Council both in its organisation, making it more flexible and responsive, and, more importantly, in its ideology. The majority of Council Arts initiatives are negotiated between the London offices and the 109 'local' (or 'country') offices, and this offers considerable latitude for those beyond the Council walls to propose and run specific projects. More often than not, the Council responds to local initiatives: DJs in Cairo, poets in the Far East, academics in Hungary. In the literary field, nearly all the Council's work is organised in response to 'bids' from regional partners (ranging from single individuals to institutions). A graduate exchange with which I was concerned, for instance, between the English Departments of the University of Wales, Aberystwyth, and Lucian Blaga University, Sibiu (Romania), although sponsored by both institutions,

could not have happened without the support, financial and technical, of the Council's Budapest and London offices.<sup>3</sup> In addition to such schemes, the Council is involved in a prodigious range of conferences, workshops, writers' tours, lectures, publications, liaison and even infrastructural support projects – the great majority of this work in response to local demands. It is at the hub of an unparalleled international educational network, maintaining a presence at countless higher education fairs and academic events.

It is my impression that the profession in the UK remains largely ignorant both of the nature of the Council's current work, and of the possible benefits of involvement in its programmes. There are exceptions – Nottingham University and the University of East Anglia, for instance, have enviable portfolios of international links – but too few institutions and individuals take advantage of the Council's resources. Since the Council is responsive, this means that more proactive sectors often receive a greater share of resources and attention. To its credit, the Council is aware (far more so than successive UK governments) of the significance to the UK's international standing of British universities. Nonetheless, despite its best efforts, the current situation is still characterised by unrealised potential, in terms not only of the rewards of intellectual exchange, but also in the hard figures of visiting students, cooperative research grants and joint publications: the higher education sector as a whole needs to take note.

The most recent modifications in the Council's advisory and managerial structures may help to rectify this state of affairs. They are aimed at increasing the input of UK subject professionals into central policy-making in relevant areas, whilst also raising the profile of the Literature Department amongst UK institutions. In June, the Arts Department replaced its standing advisory committees with a new Arts Advisory Committee (AAC), drawing together specialists and practitioners to offer advice and help with the running of projects across the range of its activities. Within this structure, the Literature Department will benefit from a new Register of Advisers, made up of some forty academics, writers, editors, publishers and even literary agents, who will provide an on-call resource, acting not only as specialist



consultants, but also generating initiatives. Caryl Phillips is to chair a writers' sub-group, and Susan Bassnett is to lead the Literature, Language and Culture Committee, (LILAC) a body more specifically concerned with activities within the Literature and Education area. A review is also now underway of Literature's flagship events, and publications (including the acclaimed annual *New Writing* anthology, and the global-circulation magazine – also available online – *Literature Matters*, as well as an expanding portfolio of web resources). Clearly, there should be much to look forward to as the process of reform continues.

Margaret Meyer, Director of Literature, emphasizes the shift in her department's policy towards readers and audiences. Whilst writers and performers are still integral to Council provision, they are now more likely to be accompanied by eager, innovative lecturers and critics, part of packages and projects directed to longer term goals. In an environment of decreasing subsidy and increasing accountability (sound familiar?), she looks 'to develop programmes to reflect widening participation, dialogue and exchange', with greater attention to reciprocal projects, and a retreat from the costly, one-off events which have to some extent prevailed in the past. For this reason, reader/audience development projects (involving, for instance, creative/critical reading activities), and translation/cross-border partnerships are to be given a high priority in the department's work over the coming years.

It is in the context of these changes – in Council practice and, one would hope, in that outdated reputation – that the recent conference, 'Transmissions: Theory, Teaching and Research in British and Literary and Cultural Studies in Europe' (9–12 May, 2002), took place. This event in many ways exemplified the distinctive contribution the Council can make within the subject community, and reveals something of the manner in which we UK professionals might, in turn, become more engaged in Council projects, and, by extension, with our non-UK peers. With the English Subject Centre's major conference, 'The Condition of the Subject: English, Professionalism and Practice', already on the horizon (17–19 July, 2003), it is perhaps appropriate to insist upon a definition of the Subject not only in terms of our local concerns, but also in relation to colleagues in the wider world of English Studies.

'Transmissions' built on the momentum of several earlier regional conferences, such as 'The Literature Anti-Conference' (Constanta, 2000), and 'Infinite Londons: A Meta-Conference', (Sibiu, 2001). As these titles indicate, a challenge to, and critique of, the habits and forms of the conventional academic conference is explicit in event design and direction. This often results in a spirit of eagerness and collaborative energy largely lacking in the more cautious, even competitive, environments of the UK and US circuit. To a degree, this is certainly consequent upon the context: in Central and Eastern Europe the prevailing form of the scholarly symposium retains a conservative and monologic resonance from an earlier epoch which delegates are eager to transcend.<sup>4</sup> Moreover, although primarily from the higher education sector, attendance is drawn from a variety of disciplinary and national backgrounds, which determines a necessarily more heterodox discursive environment. The distinguishing characteristics of 'Transmissions' were, nevertheless, to a large extent the result of careful deliberation, a function of the uniquely collective planning and management systems intrinsic to Council practice.

Rather than being 'run by London', the planning group for 'Transmissions' was drawn from local Hungarian universities, LILAC, and Council officers, supplemented along the way by input from the invited speakers themselves. For several months, a lively e-mail list debated everything from programme format, to invited guests, to pre-reading tasks and marketing policies. The burden of primary administration, however, was largely borne by the Council, releasing the time and energy of academic advisers to focus on matters of intellectual direction. In this way, the Council helps not only to set up and run a conference, but also models new ways of developing conferences (hard-pressed UK academics should really take note of the services provided by the Council's event management 'seminars' department). The strongly positive result of this structure is in the working relations which develop amongst members of the planning group. This event, needless to say, was ultimately about far more than the three days in Budapest of the conference itself.

The most obviously distinctive aspect of Council events such as 'Transmissions' is the nature of the

constituency they serve. Delegates – many sponsored by their local Council offices – were drawn from universities throughout Central and Eastern Europe (Hungary, Poland, Romania, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Croatia, Lithuania, Slovakia, Yugoslavia, Turkey), with a range of invited speakers and workshop/seminar leaders which included representatives both from these countries and from the UK, Australia, Belgium and the US. Whereas, in the past, the Council has been criticized for ‘parachuting’ star British academics into events where they have given their talks and disappeared back over the horizon, there is now great emphasis on the maintenance of dialogue and exchange, through longer trips with extended workshops and seminars, and encouragement to engage in continuing projects and take a longer term view of results. Moreover, as the variety of contributions on the ‘Transmissions’ programme reveals, UK academics do not dominate the schedules, and there were no assumptions of the pre-eminence of UK perspectives (plenaries, for instance, were delivered by Ortwin de Graef, Claire Colebrook and Philip Martin; workshops were led by paired UK/non-UK moderators). Whilst it is important for local delegates, particularly in areas where resources are scarce or historically restricted, to have the opportunity to engage with up-to-date work from the ‘centre’, it is also the case that this ‘centre’ has much to learn from its ‘margins’ – as the workshop and an energetic plenary session addressing issues in the definition and teaching of ‘Cultural Studies’ (see below) especially revealed. Indeed, Council events are now commonly organized in conjunction with, and targeted towards, the rising generation of subject professionals, a refreshing change from the days when such events were perceived as elite junkets for senior figures, or occasions for academic stars to show their colours. It is a welcome feature of the delegate evaluation forms to find UK and non-UK professionals alike commenting on the ‘shared thinking’ they experienced, and noting how much they would be able, to ‘take home and continue’.

The most significant difference between the conventional academic conference and events like ‘Transmissions’, however, is in the nature of the programme itself. Although the familiar elements – plenaries, paper sessions and panels – are all present, there is a much more explicit emphasis on dialogue and

exchange, and a deliberate attention to networking and future project development. These range from follow-up seminars to speaking engagements, curriculum sharing, and even exchange programmes. Much of the work presented in the research paper panels is exemplary (at ‘Transmissions’ I caught intriguing and provocative pieces on Swift’s reception in Bulgaria; the relations between Philosophy and Theory; and the implications of the emergence of hypertext and ‘electronic critique’), but there is particular stress on panel discussions and, above all, the workshop and seminar form. Feedback returns again and again to this aspect of the event: ‘I did more shared thinking in the last few days than I have done in any comparable period in years’; ‘discussions were livelier and lengthier than at any other conferences I have been to’; ‘Transmissions’ was ‘an unprecedented forum’. This is typical of my own experiences: at one Council event, I sat for a couple of hours with half a dozen of my peers and discussed a couple of poems by Frank O’Hara: now when was the last time you had the opportunity to do *that* with your colleagues? At ‘Transmissions’, I was in an open session on *Look Back In Anger* (delegates received the programme in advance and signed up for workshops with pre-reading tasks, encouraging enhanced levels of participation), which took off in unexpected directions when participants explained that the play, in a 1960s Moscow edition entitled *Modern British Plays*, has been required reading for generations of teenagers throughout the region. Martin McQuillan and Zoltan Marcus, moderating the forum on Cultural Studies, found themselves in the midst of a powerful debate which then entirely took over the final day’s plenary session. Again, few conferences would have the flexibility to allow such radical departure from published schedules, but delegates’ concern to address the issues effectively dictated the staging of a forum discussion. In practice, this dovetailed nicely with Philip Martin’s plenary presentation outlining the variety of pressures facing the profession generally in the UK, permitting detailed analysis and elucidation of a series of intersecting issues – institutional, national, disciplinary – impacting on the sector as a whole. Despite the range of local differences, the forum did reveal a pattern of shared concerns across UK and non-UK delegates, and began a clarification of these into

'ontological' and 'contingent' difficulties which might be isolated and, in some cases, collaboratively addressed or even resolved.<sup>5</sup> Of particular interest here was discussion of the general movement from knowledge to skills-based pedagogies, and the shared sense of pressures towards outcome-led rather than exploratory or heuristic educational practice.

There is much more that could be said about 'Transmissions'. A.L. Kennedy and Jim Crace, the 'writers in residence', were energetic and involved participants, offering both readings and an intriguing interview/discussion session. Discussion of the Bologna Protocols, which may only now be starting to trouble the consciousness of UK academics, was intense and informed, and it hardly needs emphasising that this particular constituency would not have had the chance to consider the issue except at an event such as this. Topics specific to Eastern Central Europe figured largely in conversation, with narratives of professional endurance under pressures of 'reform' and 'restructuring' so extreme as to silence even the most long-suffering UK professionals. Exchange initiatives, syllabus revision, guest-lecturing and comparative programmes have all emerged from the networking workshops. Whether the accountants in Spring Gardens (the Council's Head Office) will be able to show a positive balance sheet remains to be seen, but it is clear that few delegates had any doubts about the real value of the event.

It would be naive to suggest that English departments should be blind to the economic potential of being more involved with the Council, but nor should we ignore the extent to which the delegates at 'Transmissions' also insisted on the far less readily quantifiable benefits of this event. In many ways the British Council is facing similar problems and pressures to the higher/further education sector as a whole. Subject to pressure for measurable results and outcomes, accountable to a variety of audit and quality control bodies, it struggles to maintain a space for policies based, nevertheless, on a commitment to the fundamental values of educational and cultural exchange. 'Transmissions' demonstrated that this space is both vital and precious, and that the Council can offer the profession unique resources for the strengthening and enhancement of its sense of international and intellectual community. It is up to us all whether we respond to that invitation.

For further information about getting involved with the British Council, visit <http://www.britishcouncil.org/work/index.htm>

With particular thanks to Bob Eaglestone (Royal Holloway, University of London). Additional material from Huriye Reis (Hacettepe University, Turkey); Milena Katzarska (Plovdiv University, Bulgaria); Adriana Neagu & Cristina Sandru (Lucian Blaga University, Sibiu, Romania); Gaby Gulyas (British Council, Budapest); Margaret Meyer (British Council, London).

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<sup>1</sup> The Council derives around one third of its funding from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. It generates two-thirds of its income from commercial projects. Its mission statement is 'to win recognition for the UK's values, ideas and achievements'. It is worth noting that the British Council is not a government body, and is independent of political intervention, operating autonomously under royal charter, much like the BBC.

<sup>2</sup> The Literature Department, which includes within its remit Intercultural (formerly British) Studies, and Literature/Education, is a subdivision of the Arts Department. For an introduction to its activities, see the website <http://www.britishcouncil.org/arts/literature/index.htm>.

<sup>3</sup> For articles about the UWA/LBUS Exchange, written by the participants, see 'From Transylvania to Wales and Back', in *Literature Matters* 30, the Literature Department's quarterly publication (distributed free around the world), available online at [http://www.britishcouncil.org/arts/literature/literature\\_matters\\_30](http://www.britishcouncil.org/arts/literature/literature_matters_30)

<sup>4</sup> For instance, in less liberal times dialogue itself was often circumscribed, 'foreign' delegates were generally required to submit papers in advance, and there was far less opportunity for travel or intellectual exchange across the region. Although a sense of community is slowly now emerging amongst subject professionals, largely as a result of the Council's work, this spirit is still very much in its infancy.

<sup>5</sup> 'Contingent' and 'ontological' were appropriations of George Steiner's categories from 'On Difficulty', see *'On Difficulty: and Other Essays'* (OUP, 1978).

# Why do lecturers use communication and information technology in their teaching?

Frances Condon, Project Officer of ASTER (Assisting Small Group Teaching through Electronic Resources) reviews the outcomes of the project.

The ASTER Project has been exploring how electronic resources are used to support tutorial and seminar teaching in universities since 1998. It is multidisciplinary, covering the arts, social sciences and sciences. Through surveys and institutional visits, we have found a variety of resources in use. While some digital resources act as a medium through which dialogue occurs (email, virtual learning environments etc.), the majority of the ASTER case studies document indirect support for teaching, for example by providing material for consultation prior to class (e.g. online documents, collections on CD-ROM), or for remediation to ensure that students can express themselves in a specialist language (e.g. multimedia tutorials on essential mathematics). Although the main focus of ASTER has been to promote and support good practice in the use of communication and information technology (C&IT) in teaching, in our workshops around the UK we have also been looking at the reasons why lecturers change their teaching methods.

The motivation to change comes from external and internal pressures. External motivators include peer pressure and the expectation to use IT in teaching from colleagues and students. The Teaching Quality Assessment (TQA) process has also been a significant driving force behind departmental implementation of some level of learning technology. More recently, virtual learning environments have had considerable impact on the direction in which learning technology use is moving in higher education. Many institutions have now purchased or developed a Virtual Learning Environment (VLE), and its use may be compulsory; there may also be funding and other support available to assist in such developments. There are also strong internal motivations behind the increasing use of C&IT in teaching, including the desire to support students through additional channels of communication, and facilitate access to learning materials and support at times and places convenient for students. Personal reasons for change include the wish to be more innovative, and to focus on teaching innovations as part of personal development. There is also the hope that using C&IT will save time in teaching or assessment, or in maintaining materials, though the ASTER case

studies have shown that initially, introducing C&IT into teaching adds considerably to workloads. Time-savings are not to be expected until the course or module has been delivered several times.

There are, however, significant barriers to change, one of the greatest being limited time and support to devote to teaching. In general, efforts spent on enhancing teaching and learning should be recognised by the TQA process, but are unlikely to be valued in the Research Assessment Exercise (RAE), a process which does not recognise efforts devoted to teaching unless they result in publication in a suitable journal or book. Local facilities can also be a limiting factor. There is considerable variation in the level of support for teaching innovation provided by institutions, including teaching facilities, training and support to develop new materials or tailor existing ones to local needs, and IT staff to train teachers and students in using new equipment and materials. This is compounded in many cases by poor co-ordination and limited awareness of local resources. Staff are interested in the teaching practices of their peers, and the Learning and Teaching Support Network centres are providing an important service in this area, though many would also like departmental teaching and learning officers to keep them up-to-date with innovations in their subject and institution.

Despite these barriers, many academics continue to explore how C&IT can support them and their students. The evidence that the use of electronic resources leads to improvements in teaching and learning is limited, largely because this evidence is so difficult to obtain. However, anecdotal evidence suggests that both students and staff can benefit from introducing new materials and teaching methods through C&IT. The success of innovations depends on the time one can devote to a teaching project, the extent to which modules or courses can be modified to embed the changes within teaching and assessment processes, access to suitable equipment, personal IT skills, support, and student attitudes to change.

These issues are discussed in more length on the ASTER Website: <http://cti-psy.york.ac.uk/aster/>

The ASTER Project came to an end in summer 2002, though online resources are available at <http://cti-psy.york.ac.uk/aster/>

In the second of two articles for this Newsletter, Dr Martin Coyle, Chair of English at Cardiff University, rattles some ghostly chains.

All of us have ghosts. Hamlet's happened to be his father; mine, rather more mundanely, is the teaching quality assessment (TQA) exercise.

The TQA, of course, hardly qualifies as a ghost except by stretching the definition to include almost any memory of anything. And yet I would claim that in my own case it is more than a memory. I see it, as Hamlet says, in my mind's eye. What I see is a seminar of first- or second-year students – I forget which exactly even though I remember their presence – sitting in a line, backs to the wall in a long, thin room. I am sitting at the end of the line, pretending to be invisible yet manifestly and clumsily there. The tutor is there, too, at the other end of the room, sitting behind his desk but trying to appear as if there is no barrier between him and us. The whole thing is impossible; the room won't allow for any other arrangement; no-one is comfortable or relaxed. What makes it all the more intolerable is that the tutor is quite obviously a nice person and excellent scholar. He deals easily and professionally with the text, but such is the stress in the room that responses from the students are limited to coughing and blinking.

It is his first experience of TQA and my first visit. Neither of us could have expected anything quite so awful. On another occasion I would simply have said I'd come back later, perhaps to another session, but on first visits both parties stick to the rules and the agenda. All I can report to the TQA team leader is that the session was 'satisfactory' given the criteria, but it is a superficial judgement. One session in a visit covering three or four days should not, of course, be decisive, and it is true I saw some excellent sessions, but that first one would not go away. However, its impact did begin to fade at the end of the visit when the team had to present its overall judgement to the vice-chancellor in front of senior staff from the department. One expects vice-chancellors to be grown up, measured, sensible, not petty tyrants ready to humiliate their staff when a few strangers give a snap-shot of one or two days' teaching. The judgement we offered of the teaching as 'overall satisfactory' was, however, a signal for a piece of thoroughly despicable bullying – a hand waved

airily at the staff; a question about what had they got to say for themselves; the answers self-evidently were not required or listened to.

My ghost is not really that I remember all of this but rather that there has never been a way of apologising to those staff. Perhaps on reflection I would change my view of their merits, but the system doesn't allow for that. But even if it did it would not take away the unpleasantness or the loss of professional status in the eyes of their institution that those colleagues had to endure. The best that seems available is a kind of silent penance and the hope that the years have softened the bitterness of disappointment. But it is not a very hopeful hope, especially as TQA seems about to walk again through our midst. I refer to the Cooke recommendation that external examiners' reports be published, making reference to aspects of the teaching and learning on the basis of what has been read in exam scripts and essays. It does not take much imagination to guess how these reports will be used by a trivia-hungry media or by compilers of guides to universities.

So far there has been no move to train external examiners in QAA-speak to ensure the parity of such reports. Nor are the protocols yet clear. Will departments have the chance to object? What happens if an institution changes a report? Will students be able to use the reports as evidence of poor teaching? And what of the different systems in old and new universities, where external examiners operate according to different understandings? All the questions that shadowed TQA seem about to surface again even as many humanities departments find their funding being cut or even being closed because of RAE results. All the doubts about what we are doing and its value seem ready to undermine the changes we have been forced to make in order to accommodate learning outcomes, programme specifications, criteria-based marking and the thousand shocks that flesh is heir to.

We are indeed back, as it were, in the first scene of *Hamlet*, but at least this time we know the murderous plot in advance and stand a chance of outwitting the old mole in the cellarage.



# Prize Winning Student Essays

Earlier this year, the Subject Centre ran an essay competition inviting students to submit entries on the theme of the strengths and purposes of the English Degree. Entries were judged by members of the Subject Centre Advisory Board. The winning essay, by Christopher Thurman of Royal Holloway College, University of London appears below, followed by extracts from the two runners-up: Helen Marshal of the University of Salford and Catherine Quinn of the University of Leeds. Peter Wilson, a third year student at Royal Holloway, University of London, was awarded the prize for designing a website guiding prospective students around the English degree.

## THE STRENGTHS AND PURPOSES OF THE ENGLISH DEGREE

**Christopher Thurman,  
Royal Holloway College, University of London**

**A little learning is a dang'rous thing;  
Drink deep, or taste not the Pierian spring ...**

Alexander Pope's famous lines were written at a time when earnest pilgrims, seeking and finding (after a wearying search) the very fountain of knowledge, could kneel to cup their humble hands in the deep but clear water and bring wisdom to their lips to quench their thirst with slow, contemplative draughts. Poor mortals of the twenty-first century who seek the precious wellspring of education, however, invariably find that the ('readily accessible') fountain has flooded, too full of learning, and the muddied water is hurriedly swallowed. Information is everywhere and, as a result, increasingly difficult to sift through, accommodate and put to use – let alone savour.

Those who find themselves fortunate enough to pursue higher education (a population group that has more than doubled in the last twenty years)<sup>1</sup> are weighed down by the burden of choice between an apparently limitless range of studying options. This uncomfortable freedom is immediately restricted, however, by the constraints of necessity. For younger people leaving school or college, more often than not, foremost among these constraints is the need for parental consent: a consent that, in turn, invariably hinges on the likelihood of financial or other tangible returns at the end of a sizeable three – or more – year investment. For most mature students, first degrees or further qualifications are similarly tailored to a financial bottom line, either to increase earning potential or as part of a subsidised employee development programme. Insofar as higher education is seen as a means to an end, it is only seen as valuable or successful if it provides direct vocational or work-specific training.

For higher education institutions themselves, the need to justify the 'products' they are introducing into

the free market of employment is concomitant with a growing understanding that they must take on the mantle of a 'public service enterprise'.<sup>2</sup> In Britain, the 'red-brick university' boom of two decades ago and the subsequent decline in governmental financial support left many institutions reeling; those that steadied transformed their management to conform to profit-orientated business structures. Higher education institutions, it seems, can no longer afford to be concerned only with the education of their students: they have to compete and to demonstrate that they have an 'economic role' to play.<sup>3</sup>

Even in developed countries, despite statistics that indicate an increased student population, higher education remains a luxury. What place, then, for courses of study that are not considered a specific vocational training? What place for the study of English literature? In what way can examining the fictional content of outdated books be a means to an identifiable end that will materially benefit society? Many English scholars would suggest, in response, that such questions, like the material ideologies typically informing contemporary educational policy, are unfortunately short-sighted; literature, they would argue, has an ageless quality that affords a more objective perspective on the present. Even when difficulties caused by economic recession, social unrest or embattled public services are deemed pressing and most distressing, as the late Guy Butler (South African poet and Professor of English literature) once wrote, 'that does not mean long-term interests must be neglected. There are occasions when urgent matters may properly benefit from our attending to matters of permanent importance.'<sup>4</sup>

Others might contend that, as any sophisticated approach to the study of literary texts must at some point give consideration to the wider circumstances of their creation and publication, as well as chronicle their reception, the study of English is also the study of politics and philosophy, of economic and scientific history, of developing principles in psychology and sociology. We have seen that the wealth of knowledge and information ostensibly available for the modern student to acquire is in fact made all the more obscure



and confusing because of its disproportionate proliferation, forcing early specialization in one particular area of study. It is thus tempting to proclaim that, for those reluctant to surrender to this trend and thus relinquish the opportunity of a broader general knowledge, the wide sphere of reference for English studies allows students to 'cover as much ground as possible.' Ultimately, however, this would be a dilution of the value of English literature as a subject of study for its own sake; it is also a regressive and limiting view, consigning literature to the phenomena of the past and reducing the English degree to a retrospective study of that past. On the contrary, the process of writing literature is an inherently prospective one because the written or printed (or hypertext) word always looks ahead: it anticipates being read in the future. Our analysis of the response of great writers to their particular historical moments must also acknowledge their concern for our own time. We reflect on the capacity of English studies to teach us how to understand and reply to current demands, and in our turn to participate in the future.

The study of English is often accused of bordering on a dangerous solipsism: immersing the self into a world of abstract ideas and often abstruse literary theory in an attempt to escape the responsibilities of both being in and being for society (apologies to Sartre). Again, it must be stressed that the very nature of literary endeavour – one communicating with many – implies a conscious awareness of the relationship between the individual and the society in which he or she lives. Too often, the subtleties and complexities of this relationship remain unquestioned. On the one hand, the widespread gospel of consumerism has encouraged the pursuit of individual gratification, taking priority over any residual sense of community or shared humanity; on the other extreme, the idolatry of popular culture drives an unquestioning conformity to certain (derivative and therefore limited) epistemologies. The student of literature, suspicious of the authority of any 'master narrative', is aware of the need for the individual mind and spirit to maintain supreme autonomy. At the same time, the interaction between reader and writer forms a paradigm for the social contract formed between individuals, and for the obligations attendant on that contract.

As the advance of science has told us more and more about the world in which we live, we have become less and less comfortable with uncertainty and ambiguity. Nevertheless, we live in an unsafe or, as the corporate consultants would have it, a 'risk-dominated' age: 'twas always thus, and always thus will be', but nowadays we have hordes of economic and political theorists offering a diet of statistics, graphs and conceptual models to those lacking 'risk management strategies.' As students of these disciplines often discover, however, neat theories and formulas often lose their reassuring symmetry when tested against the rough edge of the experienced world. Despite the best efforts of social scientists and psychologists to define, predict or even control the complex behaviour of the public animal, human nature remains as implacable and as stubbornly erring as ever. Anyone who had mistakenly assumed that new media technology would inevitably lead to a world of hyper-informed humans, facing the twenty-first century better prepared than any generation before them, will have seen enough in the early years of the new millennium to realize that we are as much in crisis as ever. The inhabitants of the global village, reacting to this instability but reluctant to concede ignorance or any sign of weakness, either succumb to an indifferent moral agnosticism or turn to fundamentalist doctrines out of a yearning for solidarity. The English degree does not provide a fixed and absolute point on which to ground 'meaning' in life – this is for the individual to establish for him or herself – but it does offer a number of ways in which these difficult issues can be approached.

The study of literature helps us to accept ambiguity through an understanding of how a multiplicity of meanings can be forged in the subtle interplay between the basic structures of language. Single words have various connotations and groups of words create possibilities for alternative interpretations; texts are deliciously compact of these possibilities, challenging the reader to make sense of the interwoven strands of ideas, images and information and teaching him or her valuable analytical skills. This is a mental process analogous to the practical forms of complicated 'problem-solving' that confront the individual participating in society, but it is far more uplifting and gratifying because it is not restricted to the pattern of

equation: in the study of literature, things don't always 'add up'. Keats described this 'negative capability' as the capacity for 'being in uncertainties, mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason'.<sup>5</sup>

Another problem of the modern age, hidden behind the plethora of messages that confront us daily on computer and television screens, in newspapers, in advertising hoardings, or even on mobile phones, is the sad truth that we are not required to share ourselves and our ideas with others – our 'civilisation' has developed to a point where we are able to survive on a day-to-day basis without a real need to communicate. Similarly, as individuals in a culture of the self, we do not desire to be communicated with – we are not receptive to others. Human beings, however, are social animals: lack of communication with fellow humans ultimately leads to frustration. Miscommunication, in turn, leads to an age-old prejudice bred of misunderstanding. In every kind of human interaction, from corporate transaction to political intervention to civilian engagement, we depend on a language (or languages) from which we are increasingly becoming alienated. Literary study, in contrast, concentrates on the powerful and valuable uses of language. Students taking the English degree discover that language is our great nemesis, but that we do not know what we believe or what we perceive without it; they learn to read, write and speak the language of effective and thorough communication.

Literature, then, is dialogue. It is a conversation between generations, between nations, between the individual and society, and between the self and the soul. It is constantly foregrounding new ideas and different opinions, considering new ways of dealing with ancient problems, and providing new perspectives on the lives we live. The study of literature offers the student experiences from outside his or her frame of

reference: it embraces the 'other'. Novels, poems and short stories are the primary sites of debate for theorists who analyse the processes of 'othering' in post-colonial, cultural or gender studies. Now more than ever – when we constantly hear talk of globalisation and social equality, but rarely hear expressions of global understanding or social empathy – students in higher education need to make a conscious effort to broaden their horizons.

Recently, the Dearing Committee of Inquiry into Higher Education envisioned a 'learning society', growing out of 'a change in the values of higher education'.<sup>6</sup> This included 'a radical change in attitudes to teaching' and 'a broad context' for chosen courses of study; foremost among the 'necessary outcomes of all higher education programmes' were the 'key skills' of 'communication, both oral and written' and of 'learning how to learn.' The English degree boasts a necessarily 'learner-centred' educational ethos but is also based on small- and large-group teaching, discussion and debate – ultimately incorporating a range of opinions that break the barriers of time and geography.

The Dearing Committee report also expressed concern that a growing number of qualified professionals (as well as potential employers) are frustrated because they have discovered that their vocational training has limited them to certain skill-specific employment prospects, leaving many career paths unexplored. Prospective and current students reading for the English Degree, however, can take a confident place within the 'learning society' in the knowledge that the skills they will carry as graduates are of primary importance in any workplace. Moreover, for those who are inclined to believe that there is more to human experience than the exchange of goods and services for commercial profit, the English Degree offers a life less ordinary for students past, present and future.

<sup>1</sup> National Committee of Inquiry into Higher Education, *Summary Report* (<http://www.leeds.ac.uk/educol/ncihe>).

<sup>2</sup> Peter Maasen et al., *The European Commission New Perspectives for Learning – Briefing Paper 6: Government Policy on Higher Education Institutions' Economic Role* (<http://www.pjb.co.uk/npl/bp6.htm>).

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> Cited by David Johnson, *Shakespeare and South Africa* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), p. 208.

<sup>5</sup> John Keats, *The Letters of John Keats*, ed. M.B. Forman (London: Oxford University Press, 1948), p. 72.

<sup>6</sup> National Committee of Inquiry into Higher Education, *Summary Report*.

### **Helen Marshal, University of Salford**

One of the main joys of studying English is what could be called its liberating ambiguity. With Science or, to a greater extent, Mathematics, there is often only one 'right' answer, and all else is wrong. Even where there may be some scope for divergence, that scope is often minute; the answer must be correct to a specific number of decimal places and/or certain range of digits. English, however, is an almost boundless field of possibilities in which one may argue as one pleases, so long as one is able to back up that argument. Even if the argument is somewhat radical or unexpected, it can be argued, and indeed read, with as much reverence as a more standard or typical answer if the evidence to support the claims is there.

This ambiguity is what gives a real sense of freedom to studying, in particular, literature, but also extends of course to more language-oriented aspects in certain cases. For, although one is unlikely to contest the purpose of a particular grammatical function, one may discuss how the use of that particular function, or indeed the lack of it, can highlight deeper issues within a text.

Thus it is possible to construct an argument based simply on the *lack of*, for example, a certain function or word. To be able to argue about what is effectively *not there* indicates that the world of criticism is one of much opportunity and open possibility. One could not, for example, write an essay so easily on the lack of river names on a map or of the implications of not writing out an equation in full.

Another aspect of studying English which makes it so enjoyable is that one is able to use this licence of ambiguity with a range, and indeed a choice, of texts. As well as studying the numerous prescribed texts, one is able to make reference to one's broad reading experience, or even, in certain cases, base an essay or argument upon a favourite text. It is also possible to use a variety of different kinds of 'texts', such as television, film and advertising to illustrate a particular point, or set of points, and thus the field of English Literature is not necessarily limited to what is written down and read in printed form alone.

In fact, English enables its students to follow a number of diverse routes and areas of study. It effectively enables one to step into the roles of Historian, Psychologist, Sociologist, Therapist, Journalist, Detective, Biographer, and so on, singly or in combination.

### **Catherine Quinn, University of Leeds**

An English degree is about self development and education through the exploration of literature. A student who chooses English will never be expected to learn information by rote, or recycle the views of academics. Developing a unique creativity in relation to the course is the apotheosis of literary study. A degree in English encourages the challenge of critical views, and a communication of new opinions. Students are given freedom to construct a degree programme based on personal interests and strengths. The structure of any individual degree course is likely to centre around the benefits of personal academic choice. A host university will provide support and resources to enable effective tuition, but the significance of the award rests with the enthusiasm and motivation of a student. Tutors and lecturers can supply expert guidance in the themes and ideas which might appeal to individual academic acumen, but ultimately the degree is a personal achievement. An English degree is the production of the student, not the teacher. Lecture programmes are constructed to offer useful background knowledge, and will often allow fascinating scope for expert opinion. Students are given the opportunity to work with the most current literary views, delivered by the country's foremost academics. However, individual research of selective material is just as valid – if not more so. Students will become adept at mapping a path through critical theories and ideas.

No one English student is like another, and even students from the same university will refine their approaches to be radically individual. An English degree will encourage the discussion of academic interests with other students – refining areas of investigation by discussion and debate. Teaching oneself is a fascinating and liberating practice. Similarly, the construction is a two way process. As

students piece together, and assemble ideas and literature of personal interest, so the aspects to which they are drawn will construct them as critics. English students are engaging in a dynamic process of assimilation. They learn to refine and engage in discussions which interest them.

Students will learn to formulate their own ideas, invent their own theories, and apply them to the texts they study. Questioning accepted notions is positively encouraged. The skill enmeshed with this creative focus is an effective communication of fresh ideas. In English it is the student who teaches others their ideas.

## The trAce Online Writing Centre <http://trace.ntu.ac.uk>

TrAce was founded in 1995 and is based in the Department of English & Media Studies at The Nottingham Trent University. trAce focusses on the edges between print and new media literatures and we are currently exploring this in an Arts and Humanities Research Board funded project 'Mapping the Transition from Page to Screen' which looks at the way print writers move onto the web. Novelist Kate Pullinger is a willing 'guinea-pig' control subject for the project which also exploits the extensive archive of practice which has evolved at trAce. Artistic Director of trAce, Sue Thomas, is spending six months mining this archive and analysing the results. (<http://trace.ntu.ac.uk/transition/>) Further research into new media writing is also being funded by the National Endowment for Science, Technology and the Arts, and there is a move to establish a specific trAce Research Group.

Similar areas were also examined at Incubation, trAce's international conference on writing and the internet, held on 15–17 July this year at The Nottingham Trent University. (<http://trace.ntu.ac.uk/incubation>). Selected themes were:

### Process:

- w How do we collaborate on the web?
- w What is the difference between electronic writing and print-based?

### Writing:

- w Is new media writing literature?

### Learning:

- w How do we learn and teach writing on the web?
- w How is the online workshop different from the physical workshop?
- w How has the web changed what we learn and how we learn it?

### Culture:

- w How is the web enabling writers to address diversity and difference?
- w Is there a cultural divide between writers who use the web, and those who don't?
- w How is the interdisciplinary culture of the web affecting traditional funding models for writing?

Finally, trAce is contributing to the growth and development of new media writing through its Online Writing School, offering workshops and courses to an international range of tutors and students, and specialising in cross-over practice. (<http://tracewritingschool.com>). Private online courses are also tailored to suit, and the British Council has commissioned a series of courses for their international staff.

All of trAce's activities can be found via their website: <http://trace.ntu.ac.uk> or from Artistic Director, Sue Thomas, at The trAce Online Writing Centre, Nottingham Trent University, Clifton, Notts, NG11 8NS

**Tel:** 0115 8483551 **Email:** [sue.thomas@ntu.ac.uk](mailto:sue.thomas@ntu.ac.uk)

# News and Reports

## Our New Website <http://www.english.ltsn.ac.uk>

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**Dr Michael Hanrahan, Project Officer: C&IT, and Mr Brett Lucas, IT Project Assistant, both of the English Subject Centre, King's College, University of London**

**A**s part of a major overhaul of its web services, the English Subject Centre has launched a newly designed website. The new site is hosted on the Centre's own web server and is a public expression of our commitment to providing a flexible, responsive, and evolving service to the subject community. The new website and server better equip us to serve our community in a number of ways: they will allow us to deliver a wealth of quality teaching and learning materials; to promote community discussion of issues important to the subject; to collect in one searchable location relevant resources on topics of interest and importance to the subject; and to establish a dependable platform for the future development and delivery of electronic resources and services.

One of the site's most exciting new features is its 'Discussion' area, which includes a message board facility. Organized according to topics of interest to the community and moderated by experts in the field, this community space is open to all members of the subject who are interested in participating. By means of such interactive features, the site will promote dialogue across institutions on topics deemed important by the subject community itself. (See the interactive discussion invited by Jo Gill and Alan Brown on student reading habits in their article 'Now Read This' on page 10 of this Newsletter). In the near future a chatroom and virtual meeting area will also be added so that we can run seminars and events online.

In addition to the 'Discussion' section, the new site includes five other major divisions, each of which contains a homepage highlighting that section's content.

- w In 'About Us' you can find out about the role and function of the English Subject Centre and its staff. It includes information about our partner institutions and an expanded 'Frequently Asked Questions' section.
- w The revamped 'Events' section includes details of our upcoming events, online registration and event proposal forms, as well as archived resources from past events (PowerPoint presentations, web resources, downloadable reports, etc). And here, too, you will find links to external events of interest to the subject community.
- w The 'Resources and Links' section has also been expanded to include new features (such as our Job Exchange board or the Learning Link Database of C&IT resources for learning and teaching), as well as established, developing resources, including our directory of expertise and database of pedagogical resources.
- w The 'Projects and Initiatives' section contains material related to the various departmental projects we have initiated as well as information concerning our engagement of a host of issues and topics, including Cultural studies and English, Access and Widening Participation, and Post-Graduate training to name a few.
- w The 'Search and Sitemap' section will orientate you and enable you to search or browse alphabetically.

As our website and services develop we welcome feedback and suggestions. After you have had a chance to visit the site, feel free to complete an online feedback form letting us know what you think.



# Examining External Examining

Jane Gawthrop, Manager of the English Subject Centre, Royal Holloway, University of London

In July the Centre held a consultation with a group of external examiners in English to find out how they see their current role and its development under the new Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) policy framework (see 'Information on quality and standards in higher education, final report of the task group, HEFCE 02/15 March 2002) and other factors influencing the higher education sector.<sup>1</sup> Those interested in the role of the external examiner within the new quality framework may find it useful to read our edited version of 'New developments in external examining: a guide for busy academics' by Norman Jackson of the LTSN Generic Centre available at: <http://www.english.ltsn.ac.uk/projects/extexam.briefing1.htm>

The consultation group comprised ten experienced external examiners from eight different institutions. Between them they had examined 45 undergraduate programmes and 24 masters programmes. What follows is a brief summary indicating the scope of the discussion, areas of consensus and key points to emerge.

## 'Professionalization' of external examining

In the face of a perceived trend toward the 'professionalization' of external examining, (proposals under consideration by the Higher Education Funding Council for England include induction and training through the Institute for Learning and Teaching and accreditation by an external examiners' 'college') the importance of subject expertise was thought crucial to a number of curriculum-wide issues. Whilst the need for external examiners to pay more attention to the wider quality framework was considered inevitable, there was resistance on the grounds that it would lead to over-professionalization of the role and a dilution of the importance of the examiner's subject expertise. It was emphasised that whilst it may be desirable for external examiners to assess all learning outcomes and the whole learning experience, they are not always well placed to do so.

Various models for the role of the external examiner within a department were proposed. These included:

w The Facilitator, helping departments to set up their own procedures, and monitoring their execution

w The Initiator, recommending new policy and procedures to the department

w The Agent, relaying information about external requirements

w The Signatory, signing off results for the institution

## Marking and assessment

As expected, marking schemes and their relation to standards were much discussed. The focus was on the validity and usefulness of banding of degree classes, and on the importance or otherwise of inter-institutional comparability. The need for external examiners to be familiar with oral assessment, assessment of groupwork and new media work was highlighted, and a diversity in departmental practice in giving feedback to students was noted.

## Future developments

It was felt that the forthcoming requirement for external examiners' reports to be published would compromise the examiner's role and expose the tensions within it. Examiners will be pushed towards superficiality if not dishonesty and their contribution as critical friends restricted.

Looking to the future, remuneration, recruitment and training issues were identified as crucial in ensuring an adequate supply of competent external examiners in years to come. The pros and cons of establishing a voluntary register were discussed.

On the 'soft' side, many present attached a high mutual benefit to meeting members of the department informally, especially younger staff. Members of the group also had many suggestions about how departments might organise the processes more efficiently, based on good practice they had experienced.

The proceedings of the day are currently being written up into a full report to be made available to the subject community soon. The report will also include recommendations for further developments, including a regular forum in which External Examiners in English will be able to meet.



# Part-Time Teaching: Developing a Generic and Subject-Specific Pathway to ILT Associate Membership

Dr Siobhán Holland, Project Officer, Academic Liaison and Research, English Subject Centre, Royal Holloway, University of London

Part-time teachers, whatever their departmental status – as postgraduate teaching assistants, visiting lecturers or part-timers – increasingly perform a significant amount of the teaching delivered in higher education departments in Britain. This increased responsibility has made it more and more relevant for institutions, departments and the tutors themselves to think about the provision and relevance of training for part-time tutors and the forms that it might take.

The English Subject Centre's broader project on part-time teaching will be completed with the publication of a 'Good Practice Guide' in the autumn. In a related initiative, the Subject Centre has also been involved in developing a training module for new part-time tutors at the University of Birmingham.

As a result of discussions in the meetings of a focus group on part-time teaching co-ordinated by the LTSN Generic Centre and the Higher Education Staff Development Association (HESDA), a project is being developed which is investigating the form that training for part-time tutors might take. Its remit is in part to consider the relevance of, and responsibility for, training, and – more specifically – the nature of such training in terms of its generic or discipline-specific focus. The project is also taking into account the provision being made for the recognition of part-time tutors' teaching expertise now that the Institute for Learning and Teaching (ILT) offers an Associate pathway to membership which is available to that constituency.

In order to engage with these issues in context, the project team is focusing on developing a module, leading to Associate ILT membership, which will meet some of the training needs of postgraduate tutors in the English Department of the University of Birmingham. The project team consists of Ros McCulloch from the Staff Development Unit at the University of Birmingham who was a co-ordinator of the DOPLA (Development of Postgraduate and Language

Assistants) project which developed an inter-university training course for language tutors, Dr Siobhán Holland of the English Subject Centre who is responsible for managing the Centre's 'Part-Time Teaching' project and Dr Betty Haglund, a lecturer on a 0.5 temporary contract in the English Department at Birmingham who has had part-time teaching experience there as well as at the University of Central England.

The project team are working together to design a module which incorporates materials and approaches which are drawn from subject-specific debates and teaching concerns as well as from those generic debates about teaching and learning issues and strategies which conventionally provide the framework for training courses for tutors. The project team has had to consider the particular needs of part-time teachers, and specifically the needs of postgraduate tutors who would be teaching for the first time, in addition to thinking through issues about the relationship between the discipline-specific and the generic in contemporary higher education teaching.

The module will equip tutors to:

- w Provide constructive feedback in written and oral form.
- w Plan and implement courses.
- w Teach confidently texts, genres, historical/literary periods and theoretical issues connected and unconnected to their research specialism.
- w Select activities which will help students to work at a level appropriate to the session and to the module as a whole.
- w Develop opportunities for students to practise skills they need for assessment purposes (e.g. questioning, close reading, the use of secondary materials)
- w Foster discussions that encourage participation and support the development and articulation of students' critical voices.

- w Cultivate an atmosphere in which risk-taking and attempts to construct arguments, successfully or unsuccessfully, can be conducted confidently, and are supported.
- w Assess confidently in full cognisance of appropriate module, level and benchmarking criteria.
- w Provide constructive feedback in written and oral form.

Our work has been based in the first instance on a needs analysis conducted with postgraduate tutors and full-time lecturers in the English Department at Birmingham. This needs analysis helped us to plot a training course for these new tutors. It has also helped us to think through the different ways in which generic and subject-specific materials can be deployed in tandem to develop tutors' skills. We have also considered the role that departments play in developing and supporting new lecturers in the profession.

The project, which will be completed in the near future, has demonstrated that there is a clear role for departments in the provision of information about administration procedures and practical issues, mentoring processes and information about pastoral and ethical matters. There are also responsibilities which are likely to lie with the module tutor. The responsibilities of departmental staff and module tutors can be carried out most effectively if basic information is included in a handbook for tutors, and we have drafted a version of such a handbook along with other resources which will be made available via the English Subject Centre website shortly.

The English Subject Centre is collecting examples of similar handbooks from other departments and hopes to make these available via its website at <http://www.english.ltsn.ac.uk> in the near future. Thanks to those who have already provided us with examples.

### **Professor Elaine Showalter joins Advisory Board**

We are delighted to report that Professor Elaine Showalter has agreed to join the Subject Centre's Advisory Board following an invitation from its Chair, Professor Judy Simons. Elaine Showalter, a celebrated feminist literary critic and historian of psychiatry, is Professor of English and Avalon Professor of the Humanities at Princeton University. She is a frequent visitor to the UK. Professor Robert Hampson, the new Head of Department at Royal Holloway, replaces Professor Kiernan Ryan, the former Head of Department, on the Board. (Royal Holloway, University of London, is one of our partner institutions). They join the other members of the Advisory Board:

- Professor Judy Simons**, De Montfort University (Chair)
- Professor Graham Caie**, University of Glasgow
- Dr Maud Ellmann**, King's College, University of Cambridge
- Professor Warwick Gould**, Institute of English Studies
- Professor Barry Ife**, King's College, University of London
- Professor Susan Manning**, University of Edinburgh
- Professor Maureen Moran**, Brunel University
- Professor Rick Rylance**, Anglia Polytechnic University
- Professor Ann Thompson**, King's College, University of London
- Professor Katie Wales**, University of Leeds
- Professor Peter Widdowson**, University of Gloucestershire

# Further work on English graduate careers

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Jane Gawthrop, Manager, English Subject Centre, Royal Holloway, University of London

The English Subject Centre has been successful in obtaining additional funding from the Higher Education Funding Councils via the LTSN Generic Centre to extend its work on the careers of English graduates. We have already commissioned a report from Professor John Brennan at the Centre for Higher Education Research and Information at the Open University to:

- w Provide departments with statistical data on the employment of English graduates
- w Summarise higher education policy initiatives and projects
- w Present a selection of the work of departments in addressing the 'employability' agenda
- w Analyse how the skills and competencies of the English graduate are profiled
- w Provide some representation of the employer view of the English degree

The report will be produced in the autumn, and we will use the additional funding to circulate copies to all departments and run an event where colleagues can discuss its implications and share ideas.

We are also using the funding to extend to another four Universities a survey being run by De Montfort and Loughborough Universities of their English graduates. Entitled 'English in the Workplace', this project is gathering data on the career-relevance of the skills profiled in the English Benchmarking Statement from the viewpoint of graduates and their employers.

We will also be producing a leaflet containing individual case histories highlighting the range of career opportunities open to English graduates, and the long-term relevance of their degree studies. This leaflet will be available to all departments and to secondary schools to inform prospective English graduates about the diversity of career opportunities.

## Curriculum and Teaching Survey

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Jane Gawthrop, Manager, English Subject Centre, Royal Holloway, University of London

Heads of Department with long memories may recall a survey conducted by the Council for College and University English in 1997 on which the report 'The English Curriculum: Diversity and Standards' was based. This report was prepared with the aim of establishing the relationship between curricular diversity and standards, and to consider the community's perceptions of what constituted core graduate attributes in English.

When the English Subject Centre was established it was charged with continuing the collection of data on the English curriculum and teaching. Five years after the 'Diversity and Standards' report, years which have seen substantial change in UK higher education, the English Subject Centre is updating the report so that the community has current and comprehensive information about how English is taught and the issues faced by departments.

The English Subject Centre distributed a questionnaire entitled 'Survey of the English

Curriculum and Teaching in UK Higher Education' to all Heads of Department in August. The questionnaire seeks information about staff, students, resources, methods of teaching and assessment and course content, coverage and aims. Much of the information requested is specific or quantitative, but we also solicit comment on these and other topics.

The questionnaire is comprehensive and therefore quite lengthy, but we hope that this will result in a report that will be of use to all departments in benchmarking against a national standard and identifying the major issues for the subject. The English Subject Centre collaborated with the European Society for the Study of English to include their data requirements and hence avoid the need for a separate survey.

The survey data will be analysed in the autumn and published before Christmas. Copies of the report will be distributed to all departments and available on our website.

# The English Subject Centre's IT Project

## <http://www.english.ltsn.ac./learninglink>

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Dr Michael Hanrahan, Project Officer: C&IT, English Subject Centre, King's College, University of London.

The Centre's year long IT Project concludes this autumn with a final series of regional events dedicated to New Media and English. The project, designed to determine the extent to which Communication and Information Technology (or C&IT) has been incorporated into the teaching of English, has been guided by three objectives: mapping the use of C&IT at the subject level; identifying examples of best practice, innovation, and experimentation; and making these examples available by means of a series of free events and an online database.

The IT Project began in December 2001 with an information gathering campaign during which we wrote to all English departments, describing our project and inviting feedback from lecturers who were using C&IT in their teaching (the survey form is still available at <http://www.english.ltsn.ac.uk/ITProject/project.asp>). After gathering the information volunteered by lecturers across the country, we sought to make contact with individuals who were especially active in using C&IT. We subsequently organized over a dozen departmental visits, in which we arranged to cover as wide a geographical distribution and institutional range as possible; for example, we visited and met with colleagues at Exeter, Newport, London Guildhall, Huddersfield, Durham, and Lancaster.

We took for granted three technologies as entrenched in the life of most academics, regardless of subject: word processing, web browsing and email programs. We were interested, however, in the way in which lecturers used these essential tools beyond their most basic functions – for example, were they composing web documents with MS Word? Were they requiring their students to use browsers to access course materials and resources outside of class? And were they using email to establish group discussion among students as well as for one-to-one correspondence? We essentially wanted to identify pedagogical practices that seemed to flourish across institutions. We also, of course, simultaneously strove to locate those resources that lecturers regardless of

their pre-dispositions would readily recognize as useful and valuable applications of technology to teaching English. All the tools, resources, and instructional materials that we have catalogued have been compiled in our Learning Link Database, which is accessible from our website: <http://www.english.ltsn.ac.uk/learninglink>

Among the surprises encountered was the discovery that departments are increasingly relying on course management systems (commonly known as Virtual Learning Environments or VLEs) to develop learning and teaching resources. The sheer number of departments currently using or planning to use VLEs provided the impetus to dedicate a thread in our event series to VLEs and English. In doing so, we sought to engage the pedagogical challenges as well as the professional consequences that attend developing instructional materials within such systems.

To date we have held three regional events, highlighting issues and showcasing resources: 'VLEs and English' at the University of Durham (May 15) and University of Wolverhampton (September 4); 'Computers, English Language, and Linguistics' at Queen's University, Belfast (May 24); and 'New Media and English', at the University of Exeter (June 12). We have scheduled an additional event for the autumn: 'New Media and English' at the University of London (October 9).

All are welcome to attend this event and contribute to the Learning Link Database. Should you have any questions regarding the project, its events or the Learning Link, feel free to contact Dr Michael Hanrahan ([michael.hanrahan@rhul.ac.uk](mailto:michael.hanrahan@rhul.ac.uk)) at the English Subject Centre.

# Student Book Reviews

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The English Subject Centre welcomes reviews of textbooks, especially from students. Here are two student views of: *Studying Literature: The Essential Companion*, by Paul Goring, Jeremy Hawthorn and Domhnall Mitchell (Arnold, 2001). ISBN 0-340-75946-1.

## **Michael Warren, Undergraduate Student, Royal Holloway, University of London**

Embarking upon a degree course in literature involves a huge body of textual material to be digested and thus calls for a refinement of effective study methods. It includes new topics that appear baffling, complex and not always directly related to literature. Having just completed my first year as an undergraduate in English, I can recall many vexing issues that occurred at the outset of my degree course, and it would have been beneficial to have grasped these at an early stage. *Studying Literature*, provides a comforting response to such concerns, astutely addressing very specific points that present themselves to students: how should I integrate secondary criticism effectively? How should I be relating critical theory practically to the texts I'm studying? Goring, Hawthorn and Mitchell obviously fully understand student worries and seek to provide answers. The writers maintain their book is 'unique'. Indeed, there is certainly something fresh and satisfying in their approach, which shows insightful recognition of the degree student's requirements.

The structure of the guide allows easy navigation and quick reference. The divided sections correspond to five crucial areas of study in a literature degree course. The writers do not dismiss familiar topics such as 'writing essays' and deal thoroughly with these. However, it is the combination of this study advice with more specialised topics that sets the book apart. Literary theory, for example, is perhaps the most alien and complex subject that a degree student will come up against in their first year. The authors are tentative in their approach to this section, installing the correct response in the reader that theory cannot be pigeon holed and is often ambiguous in definition. Yet they explain themselves concisely, giving persuasive reasons for the necessity of this abstract topic in a degree course and for the most part, making the subject extremely accessible. They lay out the schools and theories in chronological order but link them thematically thus relating them more directly to the

study of literature. However, first year students might find the descriptions occasionally too complex, having to refer to other critical theory primers to find a simpler explanation.

Whilst the definitions in both the theorists section and the glossary of literary terms can be equally complicated (see 'concretisation' for example), the emphasis that is put upon using these two sections in cross-reference with the theory definitions does direct one to further explanation. Indeed, I would deem the cross-reference an excellent feature if only because it provides a more comprehensive understanding of any particular issue. Words for cross-reference are highlighted in bold, alerting the reader to the option if required. This might appeal to a student further on in their studies. It is certainly possible to acquire not only a solid foundation in a topic, but also a more mature understanding of the cultural and historical context behind each theory and terms particular to a school or theory.

The glossary that provides these terms reflects the two-fold objective of the authors (stated in the introduction): on the one hand it offers first year students 'introductory advice' on issues that they must come to grips with over their initial year. On the other, it serves as a comprehensive reference point to those in their second and third years. The glossary (although not exhaustive: try 'euphuism') deals with very specific phrases that would not appear in a more general edition of literary terms. The definitions are unusually lengthy and detailed, yet again giving an example of how it is possible to gain more than basic knowledge from the book. I was surprised at the numerous obscure terms it included that I had come across during my studying. The specificity of expression that a literature student must develop manifests itself in the technical terms of the subject: this glossary should accommodate the degree student very well with its extensive range of familiar and obscure phrases, with like terms always carefully differentiated ('work' and 'text' for example).



The glossary, like much of this book, quite obviously, concerns traditional aspects of a literature degree. However one more unusual chapter reflects the rapid and necessary integration of computer skills into the student's knowledge. Whilst literature does in many ways remain conventional in its scholarly approaches, it cannot be denied that the electronic age has made its mark upon the Humanities as a whole, with the establishment of such facilities as online archives, electronic texts and digital lectures. The section focuses on the use and effective accumulation of electronic resources and how to integrate them correctly and legally into one's own work. The content assumes a very basic knowledge of searching the web and many may feel this is a lesson in computer skills. However, I rather like the fact that the chapter functions as a reference for computer terms in addition to its principal intention. As generally, the subsections anticipate questions asked by all but the most precocious.

This anticipation should, I feel, be a great solace to students. It is true to say of the entire guide that the authors fundamentally recognise exactly the challenges facing the degree student (most certainly the first year student, from my experience). The tone in which the authors address their readers is crucial to the success of the book in appealing to a student audience. So many academic books fail to maintain that fine line between patronising simplicity and esoteric jargon. The tone is distinctly scholarly for the most part and although lucid does not dismiss a vocabulary appropriate for the intended reader. There is the odd crass metaphor ('applying theory is ... like glass-blowing') but these can be forgiven! Although not perhaps a 'one-stop' guide (especially for the fresher) this is most certainly a very accessible guide that does relate to all literature degree students and will become useful for different reasons at varying stages during one's course. The book will make an excellent primer for those beginning a degree, and will remain an extensive point of reference throughout.

### **Lisa Shahriari, PhD student, University of Essex**

*Studying Literature* is divided into five sections. The first section outlines introductory information about studying literature at university: everything from getting organised to the expectations of university level work and writing essays. The authors have struggled to enliven this section's dry subject matter with the use of odd analogies. "Mountaineers maintain that climbing is made easier when the summit is in sight – the same can be said of a degree" (10). Analogies aside, the detailed instructions and examples of how to close read different kinds of texts are particularly useful. The guide devotes its entire second section to the use of electronic media, taking great pains to explain how to search the Internet and how to determine the potential reliability of Internet sources through a careful analysis of each site's URL. Unfortunately, it fails to steer students away from sources like [www.sparknotes.com](http://www.sparknotes.com) whose essays fit neatly into the guide's definition of literary criticism: "'Literary criticism' is a very broad term which can really refer to any discourse on the subject of literature" (63). I think the text's failure to offer more explicit guidelines for evaluating critical works is a significant oversight. The authors claim their intended readers are undergraduates studying literature, and yet the step-by-step explanations of close reading and Internet usage suggest that it's aimed at first year students, in which case, more information should have been given on evaluating critical sources. The third section introduces literary theory, addressing its history as well as advancing current arguments. This section would be particularly helpful during revision for exams. The glossary of literary and critical terms, and the glossary of theorists comprising the fourth and fifth sections respectively are concise and informative. The glossaries and the pages on close reading strike me as the most useful.

Would I have found this text useful as an undergraduate? Yes. Will I recommend it to the first years I teach? Yes, with only one reservation, I think their time is better spent reading literature rather than books about reading literature.



**Sarah Lock, an undergraduate at the University of Hull, reviews *Understanding Film Texts* by Patrick Phillips, (British Film Institute Publishing, 2000) ISBN 0851707998**

This book is announced as 'a stimulating first step' towards more 'serious' film studies. Its layout is distinctive as, after a straightforward introduction, the reader is introduced to a 'Topic Guide' made up of three different tables each concerned with a separate aspect of film studies: 'Communication and Aesthetics', 'Audiences and Response', and 'Issues and Debates'. The author suggests that the tables should be used in the same way as 'hyper links' are used within a web site. These tables are then divided into subsections specific to each main topic. Each subsection contains page references so that the reader is able to go straight to a particular section (for example 'Editing') without further ado, a useful feature for students using the book for reference purposes. Throughout the book Phillips also provides useful cross references to other relevant sections.

One of the greatest strengths of the book as a whole is the way in which Phillips is able to illustrate the main concepts of film theory by referring to films and directors, in a mixture of familiar and less familiar examples ranging from 'Hollywood' directors such as Tarantino, Spielberg and Luhrmann on the one hand to acclaimed films such as Mike Leigh's domestic drama 'Secrets and Lies' and Ching Siu Ting's 'A Chinese Ghost Story'. Phillips also prints a useful table near the beginning of the book which contains a list of all the main films he will be using and, more importantly, the references needed if the reader has to order them.

This textbook would be very useful in a tutorial or seminar environment as the author again uses the margin in order to post specific questions to each individual reader. These questions could be used by students and tutors alike in order to initiate discussion within a small group on either a specific topic or a specific film. In all, *Understanding Film Texts* would be useful for students who already have some knowledge of film studies and who wish to develop their

understanding. The author's friendly and unpatronising style is also appealing as Phillips does not talk down to the reader even when he is explaining fairly straightforward concepts. This book is written for AS level students as well as those in Higher Education and therefore students at a more advanced stage may feel that they require more than is given within this book.

### Literary Conferences Website

<http://literaryconferences.britishcouncil.org>

The British Council Literature Department has a new literary conference website. A comprehensive online database of UK literary conferences searchable by keywords – author, title, subject, institution – date, UK region and whether it is open to the public. Conference information consists of dates, conference title, conference description, proposals for papers, level of participants, fees, contact details, accommodation, and venue.

Conference organisers can post details online through the website.

Add your conference details to the site for worldwide promotion. The website is available to all and will be actively promoted by British Council offices overseas in 109 countries.

For further information contact:

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<http://literaryconferences.britishcouncil.org>

<http://pgstudy.britishcouncil.org>

<http://creativewriting.britishcouncil.org>

<http://www.literarytranslation.com>

<http://www.contemporarywriters.com>

# Information and Notices

## The Windmills Programme

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**'When the wind blows, some people build walls and others build windmills ...'**

Produced by Dr Peter Hawkins, the Windmills Programme is a career management programme that can be used by those wishing to promote awareness of career potential and career development strategies in students. Peter Hawkins is co-founder and adviser to the University of Liverpool's 'Graduate into Employment' unit.

The programme constitutes a set of resources (a video, book, trainer's notes and exercises) that encourage students to reflect on the sort of career and lifestyle they want, and what they need to do in order to realise these goals. There is much practical advice on producing CVs, being interviewed, and a template for

a progress file, but the main focus is on career planning and personal reflection. The programme can be followed in its entirety, or parts or exercises used to support other activities. The trainer's notes are comprehensive and attractively presented. The programme is also applicable to academics wishing to give their own careers a boost!

The English Subject Centre has a copy of the Windmills Programme, courtesy of the LTSN Generic Centre, and is able to reproduce and circulate material to departments. (Many University Careers Services also have a copy). If you wish to find out more, please contact: [Jane.Gawthrope@rhul.ac.uk](mailto:Jane.Gawthrope@rhul.ac.uk)

## Behind the Acronym: RSS

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**As discussed elsewhere in this issue, the Subject Centre has recently launched its redesigned website. Besides a new look, the Centre's website includes a number of new services aimed at promoting the use of web-based learning and teaching resources. One such service is our Humbul Humanities RSS feed: <http://www.english.ltsn.ac.uk/humbul>**

Humbul, part of the Resource Discovery Network, provides access to select Internet resources for the UK learning and research communities. It locates, evaluates, and catalogues online resources and publishes relevant details about the resources, including URLs and summaries, on its website (<http://www.humbul.ac.uk>). The Subject Centre is currently collaborating with Humbul to catalogue resources dedicated to literatures in English.

To keep members of the subject community informed of Humbul's growing resources for English and related subjects, the Subject Centre's website contains a live feed known as an RSS (or Rich Source

Summary). According to one web pundit, Dave Winer of Userland (<http://www.userland.com>), "There is no consensus on what RSS stands for, so it's not an acronym, it's a name." While there might be some debate about what RSS means, there is no question about what it does: it dynamically and instantaneously retrieves details of resources from the Humbul database and publishes them on our website. By means of this service, members of the subject community can quickly and easily check the latest or most recent entries catalogued by Humbul. To date we have established feeds for English Language and Literature, American Studies, and Humanities Computing.

# C&IT in English Roadshows: Autumn 2002

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The English Subject Centre's year-long project investigating and mapping the use of communication and information technologies (C&IT) in English Studies is concluding in the autumn with a final regional Roadshows.

New Media and English:

w Senate House, University of London, October 9

A variety of new media and technologies are currently used to enhance learning and teaching in English departments. To provide examples of a range of practices, this event is dedicated to demonstrating the ways in which lectures have made use of web-based and CD-ROM technologies for developing hypertext and

multimedia resources. The event will be structured to afford participants the opportunity to gain practical, firsthand knowledge of these new media so that they can begin to use them in their own teaching.

It is free of charge.

Please use our online registration form at:

<http://www.english.ltsn.ac.uk/events/eventreg.asp>

## English: The Condition of the Subject

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**Professionalism and Practice in Higher Education. An international conference organised by The English Subject Centre, The Institute for English Studies, and The Council for College and University English. To be held at Senate House, The University of London July 17th-19th 2003.**

The purpose of this conference is to ask questions that are commonly excluded by the schedules, structures, and bureaucracies in which we work, and questions which focus on the materialisation of English in taught programmes at undergraduate and postgraduate level.

Plenary Speakers will include:

**Jonathan Bate**

**Catherine Belsey**

**Ronald Carter**

**Ato Quayson**

**Elaine Showalter**

What is the condition of English now, and how are its subjects (the curriculum, the students, lecturers, and their research activity) constituted? How have the mechanisms governing our professional lives in the modern university affected the subject? Is the 'English' of our research the same 'English' that we teach? Do our students understand it in this way? Is English now (an open access subject nationally) the same as the selective English of a decade ago? What is the English 'class', and how are we changing it or reinforcing it?

How are we teaching the new English curriculum, and what is happening to the old curriculum? Is English a subject with no centre and no margins? This conference will address such questions and also provoke enquiries of a broader, more general kind:

w What it means to be 'in English' now

w The future for interdisciplinarity

w The values of an 'English' education

w The relocation or abolition of 'the literary'

w The future of English in the Modern University

w The future of English academic publishing

w Theory wars over

w The understanding of English outside the academy

If you are interested in such discussions, or in adding more pertinent ones to the list, or in being involved with the organisation of the conference programmes, then please contact the Subject Centre by emailing the Administrator, Carol Eckersley, on [c.eckersley@rhul.ac.uk](mailto:c.eckersley@rhul.ac.uk), or see <http://www.english.ltsn.ac.uk/events/intconf/index.htm>

The English Subject Centre Newsletter is produced twice a year and distributed widely through all institutions teaching English in Higher Education.

The newsletter's aims are:

- to provide information about resources, developments and innovations in teaching
  - to provide a discursive or reflective forum for teaching and learning issues
- to evaluate existing and new teaching materials, textbooks and IT packages

We welcome contributions. Articles range from 300–1500 words in length, and can be submitted to the Subject Centre electronically or in hard copy.

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