

AUSTRALIAN UNIVERSITY HEADS OF ENGLISH

Meeting Minutes

Annual Meeting, University of Queensland, November 13 2013

Present: Anna Johnston (UTAS), Amanda Nettelbeck (Adelaide), Nicole Moore (ADFA), Paul Eggert (Canberra), Helen Groth (AAL, UNSW), Gillian Russell (ANU), Brigitta Olubas (ASAL), Meg Tasker (Ballarat), Paul Magee (Canberra), Joy Wallace (CSU), Lynne McCredde (Deakin), Giselle Bastin (Flinders), Steve Evans (Flinders), Kay Ferres (Griffith), Richard Lansdown (JCU), Alison Ravenscroft (La Trobe), Maria Mitchell (Macquarie), Ken Gelder (Melbourne), Sue Kossew (Monash), Jesper Gulddal (Newcastle), Melissa Hardie (Sydney, English Association), Jennifer McDonnell (UNE), Julian Murphet (UNSW), Chris Danta (UNSW, AAL), Clare Archer-Lean (USC), Deborah Pike (UNDA), Anne Collett (UoW), Leigh Dale (UoW, Convenor of the joint conference 2015), David Carter (UQ), Tony Thwaites (UQ), Ralph Crane (UTas), Matthew McGuire (UWS), Anthony Uhlmann (UWS).

Minutes: Jesper Gulddal

SESSION 1: 10AM-12PM

Chair: Helen Groth

1) Anthony Uhlmann's Annual Report

Anthony Uhlmann spoke to the main purpose of the Annual meeting: to adopt a structure of governance that would give AUHE legitimacy. This would require an executive with representatives from all states. Further, Anthony highlighted that Jesper Gulddal has secured support for the AUHE secretariat from the University of Newcastle.

The president proceeded to speak to the annual AUHE survey results, which have been posted in the AUHE Dropbox folder.

2) Reports

Leigh Dale reported on the 2015 Joint Conference. Leah Price (Harvard) and Carolyn Dinshaw (NYU) are confirmed as keynote speakers. The date has been set to July 8-11 2015. 30 Heads of professional organisations have been contacted in the hope of avoiding collisions.

Leigh also reported that a special issue of Australian Literary Studies on the state of English in Australia will be published before Christmas 2013.

3) Discussion

The discussion focused on three main issues:

a) it was generally agreed that the present version of the survey does not produce sufficiently reliable results, and that the survey needs to be refined and expanded before being sent out again.

b) the issue of a national narrative of English was debated, and it was pointed out that such a narrative is problematic since English programs are associated with different programs at different universities (linguistics, theatre studies, film and media, creative writing).

c) FoR 2005 was suggested as a cornerstone of program identity. However, some English programs cover several FoR codes. It was suggested that AUHE endorsed FoR 2005 as a defensive measure, yet this proposal was not adopted. Instead, it was proposed that the next iteration of the AUHE survey would include a question about the FoR codes in which English staff are winning grants. So as to raise our public profile, it was suggested that ARC grants in English are posted on the webpage.

4) AUHE governance

Helen Groth outlined the proposed governance structure for AUHE, which is based to a degree on that of ASAL. The proposal envisions an executive with the following membership:

- President
- Vice-President (Administration)
- Vice-President (Financial)
- Vice-President (Outreach)
- State representatives
- Seconded members from English organisations
- Working group convenors

For the sake of continuity, Anthony Uhlmann proposed that the new president will be elected from among the three vice-presidents, and that the outgoing president remains a member of the executive committee for one year after his/her departure.

In addition, the possibility of establishing an advisory committee was raised and met with general support. This committee would consist of major writers, public figures, high-level academics etc.

5) Elections

Elections were unanimous and provided the following outcome:

President: Anthony Uhlmann

Vice-president (Administration): Jesper Gulddal

Vice-president (Financial): Richard Lansdown

Vice-president (Outreach): Nicole Moore

State representative (Tasmania): Ralph Crane

State representative (Queensland): David Carter

State representative (NSW): Paul Giles

State representative (Victoria): Ken Gelder

State representative (ACT): Rosanne Kennedy

State representative (WA): Tanya Dalziell
State representative (SA): Giselle Bastin

It was decided that Graham Tulloch would act as liaison to the Australian Academy of the Humanities, and that Paul Eggert would be the AUHE liaison to the International Association of University Professors of English (IAUEP). Further, Paul Magee was elected liaison to the Australasian Association of Writing Programs. Finally, it was proposed that links with the MLA were established, and that members of the AUHE with pre-existing relations could facilitate this.

6) Discussion

The discussion following the elections centred on potential topics for working parties and issues of concern to the members. They included:

- ECRs and the possibility of senior mentoring
- ECR representation on the executive
- The age distribution among staff (discipline sustainability)
- Reliance on sessional staff
- FoR codes and how they count towards English

It was decided to work in a contained way for the next few years.

Several members pointed out that it is currently hard to find reliable data on the discipline of English in Australia. This can be addressed by introducing a refined version of the AUHE survey. Two recent books were mentioned in this context: James F. English, *The Global Future of English Studies* (2012) and Katherine Bode, *Reading by Numbers* (2012). It was signalled that the Australian data in the former volume is not of a sufficiently high standard. It was proposed to hire a Research Associate to collect data.

SESSION II: 1PM-4PM

Chair: Brigitta Olubas

1) Working Party on Learning and Teaching Standards

Nicole Moore spoke about the activities of the working party on learning and teaching standards. Disciplines are under pressure as a result of the upcoming auditing process to develop discipline learning thresholds, yet English has no national standards to benchmark against. The working party proposes to draft a set of national learning objectives for the discipline. A report was circulated prior to the meeting and is available on the AUHE website.

The ensuing discussion revolved around the following issues:

1) The potential disjunction between a “compliance” dimension and a “pedagogical” dimension. It was generally agreed that this project should not be seen as a “box-ticking exercise”,

but should ideally be an occasion for examining how well we teach students as well as an opportunity for pedagogical innovation. It was suggested to find wordings that better integrate this pedagogical aspect into the standards project.

2) Two caveats were raised:

- Developing a single set of TLOs for English and Creative Writing might be seen as an pretext for doing away with one. Consequently, we ought to make two sets.
- In pushing for a national set of TLOs, we might lose some of the benefits of institutions working alone. Competitive marketplaces might call upon disciplines to find their own strengths.

3) Several members reported being in the process of finalising their TLOs. This being this case, it was suggested that the AUHE establish a repository to facilitate collaboration. It was agreed to set up a Dropbox folder for this purpose.

Joy Wallace outlined an OLT-funded project on teaching first-year curriculum in the context of discipline threshold standards. In the context of this project, a survey has been conducted to explore the relationship between how first-year students and first-year teachers understand their discipline. Joy Wallace suggested that a formal relationship be established between the OLT project and the AUHE working group on standards. This proposal was adopted by the members.

2) Working Party on Secondary/Tertiary English

Leigh Dale reported on behalf of the Working Party on Secondary/Tertiary English, initially identifying two problems, namely that English teaching is taken for granted (“if you can speak it, you can teach it”), and that secondary English is dominated by Education. Leigh emphasized the need to work in the very long term to influence how English is taught at the secondary level.

To further this aim, the working party proposes to:

- 1) map the teaching of English at the secondary level (not just the curriculum, but also the questions that are asked of texts, what is taken as legitimate evidence, etc.).
- 2) develop a project looking at the nexus between secondary and tertiary English teaching.

Leigh suggested that state representatives be asked to draw up maps of secondary teaching in their state or alternatively identify someone better positioned to do this.

Leigh called attention to a pilot project run at the University of Tasmania, which asks the following questions:

- What is the place of English literary studies in the pre-tertiary sector?
- Do university lecturers have the same pedagogical priorities as secondary teachers?

- Do teachers in the two sectors use the same terminology?

The point was made that we start behind our colleagues in other areas because English is taught so differently at the secondary level. A key aim of the UTAS project is to build communication between the two sectors.

Ralph Crane detailed this project entitled “Teaching English in Tasmania. Community of Practice” (TETCoP), which covers 60 schools (private, public and catholic). A survey of 300+ first-year students has resulted in the following findings:

- Many were older than 18-20
- 20% over 26.
- Mostly women (2-to-1)
- Most were Australian borne
- Most were Tasmanians

Ralph Crane will provide information about this project for the AUHE webpage.

Leigh Dale announced that she would be stepping down as chair of the Secondary/Tertiary English working party. The group is looking for new members and aims to have representatives from all states.

Attendees generally agreed that the lack of dialogue between Education and English surrounding secondary teaching of English is a problem for the discipline, and that the working party should continue its efforts to map the teaching of English in different states.

5) Final Discussion

Anthony Uhlmann presented a list of issued needing to be dealt with in the short-term:

- Posting of Minutes
- Setting up an AUHE Dropbox folder
- New survey
- Word cloud of topics/subjects
- Mapping of how English relates to Education in different institutions (survey)
- Mapping of relationship between English and Creative Writing
- Mapping of FoR codes used at different universities
- Mapping of relationship to secondary sector in each state.