



Minutes from the 2022 Annual General Meeting

**President's Report - Ann Vickery**

1: Last year we had to rebuild the website from the ground up. We lost all the material on the website this year we got a new web Administrator Sara Pini, who's actually based in Italy and she has been rebuilding the website so that it's much more streamlined.

We're rebuilding the resources on it. Information on judges' reports, contact information, and it's the primary external facing instrument of the organization.

2. We also have Facebook, which Naomi's been overseeing and that's been going for quite a while. But we also have a new twitter feed now, which Eric has been initiated.

3. I also just want to thank Tanya Dalziell as well, who also had the idea of initiating a newsletter to members that we hope will be more regular in 2023

4. A large part of AUHE is advocacy, the Lobby Committee covers that aspect of our organisation.

5. AUHE also provided oversight into the ERA Journal list and the literary studies code, even though that era has been deferred. This shows the importance of an organization like a in terms of being able to advocate what journals we are publishing in.

6. Revised our mission and value, statement. This was led by Rob Clark. A response to the need to rethink the discipline and the professional matters. The term English carries with but the baggage of colonialism, invasion, and assimilation. These issues are of course matters of ongoing debate. We wanted to be more explicit in stating the set of values that we sought to promote and uphold as representative of members across Australia.

We consulted other literary studies organizations in Australia. We had comprehensive surveying of mission and value statements internationally within the discipline of literary studies.

7. The Value of Literature symposium: AUHE has always been a signatory of the Humanities and Social Sciences Association, and this year CHASS inaugurated a. HASS Congress at the University of Melbourne, where it brought together disciplines under its umbrella to hold a series of coordinated conferences with the aim to encourage some interdisciplinary attendance, and to share what we do across: the disciplines.

With the annual AUHE symposium, the idea is that it will move from institution to institution. This, again, was the first go at it, and we felt that we are it was a success. The idea is that we will hopefully curate those papers from the symposium and see them brought together into a journal issue.

8. In terms of what else we do. we do provide strategic financial support for various events and prizes, such as the Voss Prize and the AUHE prize in literary scholarship.

9. In terms of projected activities. I know that we are about due for a state of the discipline survey generally. We would probably be doing them every 2 years. we'll be looking towards doing one in 2023.

### **Lobby Committee Report – Ben Etherington and Jumana Bayeh**

The wake of the vetoing of several literary studies grants galvanised members from across the country.

The first thing we did which I'm sure many of you are aware of is to write an open letter to the powers that be to the then Education Ministers, decrying what had happened, and calling for the removal of ministerial veto.

That open letter was signed by over 2,000 people. mostly academics in Australia, including, I would say at least half of the literary studies academics across the country and a huge amount of media interest was generated. We had at least 10 stories in in national media that mentioned, or in some way touched on that letter. So it helped build pressure in the early months of the year leading up to the election. On the back of that the group I just mentioned formed and started to think about lobbying strategies or campaigning strategies.

The first thing we did was to engage with the parties that were also in some way opposed these moves, including Labor and the Greens. Labor did not want to get involved ahead of the election. Advice from Labor was that non-controversial reforms such as these should be done in the background once labor is in power rather than try to do something publicly.

The Greens called for an inquiry into the ministerial activities.

After several emails Jamuna eventually received a letter in mid-September inviting us to participate in a review of the ARC, which was announced in early November, and whose submissions do you in mid-December.

Trying to remove the ministerial veto on ARC grants and hopefully ensure that we don't get the 3 studies grants cancelled in the future is, do we want to engage in with Labor? To try and achieve non-controversial reform given how little success we've had in talking to them. that would require assistance, I think.

I mean, do we want to be a publicly campaigning organization, or do we want to be a privately or backroom lobbying organization on this issue?

BE: we really need to get out into the public school to defend and advocate on behalf of our discipline. So if we want to have a broader conversation there as well. that would be the time.

MN: Significant issue right now is what's happening with the era. But unfortunately, we don't actually know

the real benefit of the Lobby Committee is that we've seen that it does have actual real impact. It has border impact across the community, and that we should actually, I think.

### **Teaching and Learning Report**

KD took on the as a new chair of the teaching and learning community, but only midway through the year. So we're still putting together early stages for the next project.

CAL: We've basically finished all the data gathering, and we've begun the analysis and as Covid got in the way, the Survey development took much longer than we expected. We got the survey out middle of last year, but it there was a lot of issues in the first kind of 5 months of trying to get respondents and by the end of last year we had 85, completed, but only 32 of those had done all the questions.

I just really want to thank Jude Seaboyer and Adele for all of the help in doing all of that, and we send it out again and you have all helped, I think, at some point with that, and so have a lot of the associations, including it, a lot of library associations. We did a lot of Facebook circulation and went through a lot of teacher contacts as well.

And so by June or July, perhaps this year we decided that we would close the survey, and we had just under 300 respondents. and all of who'd majored in English over the last 3 decades. and they all completed the survey. So that was good and we ran it through in vivo, thanks to my colleague here at that, and it pulled up a lot of soft skills around critical thinking, deep understanding, writing, expertise, reading and appreciation and employment outcomes in terms of how English it had was a lot around research actually teaching and advanced communication skills.

And there's lots of different occupations that we've got in there when we drill into that data. The in vivo pulled out a lot of stuff around experience, including the positive class sizes, the kind of lots of really lovely feedback about teaching, and the kind of amazing experience of that. but also concern for the future of the discipline was articulated by a lot of respondents. Adele and I then drilled in and did a lot of manual coding across all of the respondents. I mean, we came through it lots of different ways. we're still doing the process of looking at that, according to demographic variables, and seeing that that affects it. and we will be compiling those papers in the New Year.

But it's interesting when you do this manual process, what you get beyond the in vivo findings, which is the negatives are a lot around your eccentricity of discipline one that is self-replicating. and lack of links to the experience of English in school, which some of us they familiar with and also comments around the kind of low employment opportunities. Or, more specifically, a lot of respondents, saying they weren't taught how their English would be useful to them in their employment; but they can see now how it was but that they had to find that out, and they would have appreciated having that as part of their learning experience: the positives were really interestingly around aesthetic appreciation and lots and stuff around pleasure and the empathic capacity and personal skills. Collaboration skills. Sophisticated communication skills, Research skills.

If anybody would like to join us and already has a lot of experience in learning and teaching research English, and we would love to hear from you. and we'll be reporting back to the New Learning and Teaching Committee, and it may be that some of the findings of this actually provide us with some initiatives that we could do.

particularly around invigorating some of the teaching of the discipline with some trial projects or pilots. I know that that's something that a lot of people are thinking about. I'm. Involved in search around kind of: thinking around anti-colonial. the invigoration of the discipline there's people doing stuff in sustainability and English. It just so.

#### MN: Survey of Journals Ranking Report

And I had wanted to just circulate it so that people could read and advance the report which we wanted to make fairly concise and readable, but to just go some. Through those some of these things. Just here's a brief look at the demographics.: And while I'm kind of talking about

demographics, I want to just thank all of those people who participated, and who took the time to give us the data. So, as you can see, we've got the majority in full-time positions in terms of that 68 valid responses. We've been trying to work out actually what percentage of academics that is in Australia. We think it's fairly representative. It's been quite difficult to find that information, partly because across the institutions there are in some places English academics include English and theatre studies academics, and in some places it includes English and creative writing academics, and in some places it just includes English academics in some places it includes people that are there just to teach English units into education degrees, for example. So it was hard to get a really clear sense, but we think it represents at least 50%. But we're still kind of working on, trying to get a more accurate number for that 250. There was also a diverse range of working situations there.

Senior lectures were the most represented to group. And here is gender and seniority. So, while there were more women respondents than men. 64% were women. Men were more likely to hold higher positions at the universities. Which is you know, replicates what we what we know.

It is interesting to note that the ranking of the journal and institutional policies come in at Fourth and sixth in terms of the 5 the top consider actually should put top 6 considerations. I want to add institutional policies there and this kind of replicates some quite interesting findings from the US. They're saying faculty are now according less importance to the journal's impact factor when deciding where to publish. Faculty survey from last year in the US are also saying it's the journal's relevance and readership as being as listed as the top characteristics. Thus most people are, or many people are, under certain kinds of mandates or systems.

This is quite an interesting slide so the largest cohort of respondents, as you can see, came from the group of 8 universities followed by universities that are not members of any groupings. That was 28. And this is in the report 11% working organisations that are members of innovative research universities, 8% in the new generation universities and 6% in the at and the Australian technology network.

As some universities and members of multiple groupings. We also asked about location, and 30% of our respondents came from regional universities. While across all of the findings about 60% of respondents reported their university had specific policies, guidelines, or mandates about preferred publishing outlets, and these were incredibly varied.

They were slightly less common in Go8 universities in comparison to the less research, intensive and or regional universities. You can see in the report that the mandates and the policies differ quite substantially and there's more we're kind of working on articles that are a bit more fine-grained about that. So we asked about the implications for publishing or not publishing in people's institutions preferred outlets.

These affect people, that they are different across different universities, and they affect people differentially. We were one of the most interesting things is how varied they are. but consistent with prior research. The less research-intensive and or regional universities are more likely to have such policies in place and put greater pressure on their staff to comply compared with Go8.

So that's where the perception of negative impacts is most strong.

And obviously some of the respondents noted a range of negative impacts: Most notably on career progression, local journals and marginalized subfield. So there's a kind of some of the general impacts that it that it impacts people's, careers. It impacts kind of journals working in local areas and and subfields that are marginalised.

And of course, colleagues working in Australian literary studies are particularly at disadvantaged. So one of the things that came did come out of this study was the inequity of the system, and it's particularly casual academics and ECRs are most vulnerable.

Here are some of the specific impacts. So when oh, workload allocation. They work out allocation and the promotion workload allocations, institutional reputation, grant support.eligibility for sabbatical annual performance reviews, job interviews. These are the kinds of specific impacts. People noted that these mandates were having on their on their careers. So this question, then comes: is there a place for rankings, lists? And I actually don't know how many people who are there today? AU has made the case for better data/ That's where the sector seems to be going. You know one of the things that AUHE should be doing is producing its own lists, although that was not the majority view. and I suppose it's kind of important to remember why we have rankings. In a sense they seem to. We seem to have them for 2 reasons, which is one for institutional reputation, because it's related to the Rankings for institutions. And so it's a capacity for universities to market themselves, and bring in particularly international students. But as AU's talk showed this kind of question of reputation, isn't really, that affected by that his journal rankings.

Or that there you know there's a kind of tenuous relationship between rankings and reputation, anyway. And the other reason is, it's a proxy for quality? It's a kind of management tool to determine quality when you don't actually know anything about the topic, or you want to have a really easy way of assessing quality, so it's kind of for the convenience of management.

Critiques and implications.

Problematic – a creation of lists, particularly within a discipline as diverse as our discipline. So I guess what our report is saying is that we think that the use of journal ranking this is unnecessary and problematic. and I want to say that we're not. That that view is not a kind of refusal or a form of protest against managerialism. It's actually that view we came to that view because we think it's kind of impossible to do so without causing damage to the discipline. Obviously, you know, this is now over to the aux she to make their own call. but they are associated with negative consequences. They inhibit individual academic capacity to build careers from subfields in which they have expertise. It can become divisive. I think that this is a conversation that needs to be got ongoing. But that question of how would you make a list?

MN: Very punitive institutions. I mean some of the stories we heard particularly in interviews, were quite heartbreakingly. Actually, about what's happening in the sector, and that that is tending to be happening in smaller, smaller, less research-intensive and regional universities.

You couldn't even guarantee that people would use such a list if you or that they wouldn't combine it with their own bespoke list. I mean, there's lots of kinds of mixes and matches around this list, and I think it's inevitable that the a. You actually would end up marginalizing field marginalizing fields

within literary studies. They vary enormously as do the implications for staff who are subject to them and they have exacerbated in existing inequalities within the tertiary sector in Australia.

And what we tended to find is that most of the policies and mandates are topped down often with limited or no consultation. In many cases people staff had tried to put forward submissions. We've seen a number of submissions that were listened to. So there was a frequent lack of transparency about how decisions had been made particularly bespoke when institutions used a combination of existing lists like Scimago and their own little bespoke things what for the purposes of this report.

We came up with a set of recommendations to help clear up uncertainties that surround these processes. A substantial number of people didn't know they had policies and mandates, but didn't quite know how they worked advocate to universities in the Government for fair and rational processes of research assessment, and we could develop a sector wide manifesto, a little bit like the belonging statement. And there are kind of manifestos that you can draw upon issue referred. Research informed statements about the limitations and effects of existing ranking models send clear guidance to universities about disciplinary traditions in English.

So it's similar to what was being said about, you know, lobbying to the sector to raise awareness about the ways in which these rankings are operating to disadvantage certain academics and exacerbate existing inequality, so that's a kind of out foot-facing set of recommendations.

There's also something that we can do internally as a discipline which is both boost reviewing practices for research outputs and grant applications. Set up a sector-wide mentoring system to help people craft careers, and particularly there are some people in smaller universities. It might be the only English person in their institution, and it can be pretty difficult and lonely are trying to argue your case. in those circumstances, and then support local journals which have been particularly disadvantaged. I just want to add that.

We did also undertake a range of interviews as part of this project. So we're hoping to have a series of outputs based on this project, but we wanted to just get the report to the AUHE: for this AGM/

TD: This I think the Peer review system itself. As colleagues, we need to remind ourselves that we also need to be peer reviewers, so that the system keeps working, and that we continue to support in solidarity each other's work.

HK: We all know peer reviews important, but many people find they don't have the time to do it and in my experience has been that everybody thinks mentoring is a great idea, but it doesn't materialize. And it I mean, I've had that experience where I've moved from ECR into mid-career across 4 different institutions into 4 different discipline areas in 8 years. And the way that guts research is incredible. And yet every time I started at one of those new institutions. The very first thing I did was proactively approach the head of research and ask if an arrangement put in place where I could be mentored to get myself back on track for research. And not once did that come about and it just. I guess I'm just saying that I think I hear it come up so many times, but I think the reality is that doesn't often happen, and now I am in an institution where I know any person in my English department for that to be a really valuable and useful tool needs to be so much more than an idea that's talked about as to be at the heart of generosity terms of collegiality in academia. I've always felt that the strength of Academia is a generous I'm not sort of saying this to be planning or to be negative. I'm just saying my experience has been it? Doesn't: come.

## **Open discussion about the state of the discipline**

Different institutions commented on the growth, declines and changes in English.

### State Reports

Institutions  
Enrolments  
Crossovers  
Majors  
Staffing  
Honours  
Name of disciplines/ Mergers  
New positions  
Casual conversions

## **AUHE Award in Literary Criticism Winner awarded**

Denise Varney, *Patrick White's Theatre: Australian Modernism on Stage, 1960-2018* (Sydney University Press, 2021)

## **Winner of AUHE Voss Prize awarded**

Behrendt, Larissa, *After Story* (University of Queensland Press)