

Australian Universities Heads of English (AUHE) Meeting 1 (November, 2012)

Summary of Motions

1. That the new organisation be called the Australian Universities Heads of English
2. That funding be sought for an office at an Australian University
3. That meetings take place annually
4. That a method of effectively communicating between members be established
5. That a method of effectively sharing information between members be established
6. That the next meeting determine the ongoing structure of the organisation
7. That a working party be established on benchmarking the discipline
8. That a working party be established on tertiary and secondary curriculum

NOTES TO SECOND HOUR OF DISCUSSION OF FIRST MEETING OF THE AUSTRALIAN UNIVERSITY HEADS OF ENGLISH GROUP

Ken Gelder: We need to develop compelling narrative at three levels

1. Research Level (to Government)
2. Institutional Level (to powers that be within our institutions)
3. Teachers in the Tertiary and Secondary sectors

We need to develop a coherent sense of who we are at both a national and international level. The Australian History Association is very proactive.

Paul Eggert: the Australian Association for the Humanities is not a representative body, but it offers key links to government.

The discipline of Education has pushed us out of the conversation on English curriculum. We need to address our place in the curriculum discussion.

Nicole Moore: there are no established disciplinary benchmarks or thresholds against which we can establish ourselves and argue for our excellence.

We need to take care of the problems in our front yard first. That is, setting the standards for our undergraduate curriculum. This is a way of leading from the front. It will clarify what it is that we do.

Lyn McCredden: I had to work on benchmarking at Deakin and made use of the UK model, which is helpful. The UK English Association QAA.

Leigh Dale: University Wollongong hosted ACUTE, a Canadian body. This involves an email list of Heads of English and offers a source of information and support on how to do things. ACUTE also have a blog. Question for us is whether we want a Federal model bringing together the 20 literature associations or one to which everyone belongs.

Helen Groth: The idea of an overarching body like the MLA is great in the abstract but how does it work practically?

Leigh Dale: Casual teachers are in most need of support. ACUTE involves or works with postgraduates and casuals and considers their issues.

Liam Semler: we could think of CHASS. What functions might it undertake in backing our discipline?

Paul Magee: The excitement of CHASS that existed five or six years ago is now waning.

Ken Gelder: An association needs office management, a university office with infrastructure of this kind. You could develop profiles of all departments, match trends, develop curriculum trends, and look at curriculum outcomes.

Liam Semler: 50 years ago AULLA would have been a peak body. Now AULLA couldn't take it on without many more resources. You would need to morph AULLA in order to make it work as a peak body.

Jennifer McDonnell: it is a question of identity. ACUTE and the AHA have other members: libraries and other members could be important it could be important to group with them.

Bernadette Brennen: what is the brief? Will a peak body sitting above all associations put all emphasis on research?

Peter Otto: There is a question of continuity: if only the Heads are involved it will be a minimal structure, which is not bad.

Graham Tulloch: while we have a strong interest in research issues more fundamental issues are: getting students to read books; our reliance on sessionals; what are our responsibilities to the subject? Research is less pressing than questions of pedagogy. An annual meeting should bring together teaching and research in English and its primary concern should be with the teaching English and secondly with the question of research.

Paul Eggert: The question of a representative body and what funding it would need is a legitimate outcome of today's discussions. The AAH will want to hear of outcomes. The question of funding can be just directed back to the Academy if we think a body needs to be set up.

Helen Groth: At a practical level an annual meeting needs financial support; practical and ongoing funding is a dilemma that needs to be solved.

David Carter: as for a title, the Association of University Teachers of English is something that would speak outside this room. Think of the acronym UTE.

Bernadette Brennan: getting back to the questions email ASAL state representatives report back two times a year and are required to bring information from members. It works. A committee could be formed that accepts e-mail each year.

Gillian Russell: there's an idea for developing and sharing information which would be valuable. An information hub. A blog or correspondence where perhaps we could plan meetings.

Helen Groth: I think getting people together in a room is important. What is the agenda for the meetings? It is important that consultation can go on throughout the year.

Gillian Russell: there is a political question. There is a need for more lateral engagement across institutions. We need to talk to each other in informed ways to meet the increasing challenges in this sector.

Helen Groth: There is a collective panic around. A point of focus is teaching literature online and online delivery. How do we define what we do in opposition to models that claim to standardize delivery of content.

Brigita Olubas. Heads of Departments is a minimal model but there are disadvantages to it. History has a meeting as part of an annual conference. People are here for the Australian Academy of the Humanities. The Heads might meet alongside a conference that has a research focus.

Lyn McCredden: and we can't just focus on teaching.

Ken Gelder: There are four or five stands of engagement. Research has to be there. We need to try to track relations between teaching and research and the kinds of effects they have. It is important not to silo it. It could coincide with conferences. If things go into the AAH they need to come back, to feed back to us.

Robert Phiddian: I'm a fan of the meeting model out of which can emerge working groups.

Lyn McCredden: we need to identify two or three issues.

Paul Giles: the logistics of the institutional interactions is tricky. The International Association of American studies tried to get national associations to contribute. One of the key benefits of a Heads of Department meeting would be how it might work as an information conduit. It could be as simple as emails. In the UK the QAA became quite dependent on the English body for teaching quality assessment. It is capable of setting agendas. The CCUE has had lots of practical suggestions that help to safeguard the discipline. We don't know what more might develop down the line. It is helpful to safeguarding the discipline to have a national peak body available.

Nicole Moore: we need a body that'll set standards.

Ralph Crane: I strongly support the idea of an annual meeting. Universities will fund it. In Tasmania there is an association of teachers of English. The fact that two University

teachers joined it made the news. We need to lobby the education sector by joining these bodies.

Leigh Dale: There is a National body of teachers and there is a NSW body. The challenge is the stuff concerned with what is the sustainability, what unites us. Can we replicate the experience of this meeting for all colleagues? Why don't we have a federated conference of all English associations every four years? It would be a branding experience and build a deeper connection across the discipline.

Lyn McCredden: developing our profile is a long term goal. We need an information hub. What we need now is benchmarking for TEXA; this is a primary concern. What we need now are things to do with the National Curriculum. What we need now is to respond to the ERA

Ken Gelder: we need a representative body. Heads are representatives and carry that role. The organisation has to have a representative function.

First it must represent itself to itself checking research outcomes, staffing self-monitoring. Secondly it must represent itself to others: Schools, Universities, the media, the government, the funding bodies. That is, it has two basic functions: to monitor the state of the discipline and to represent ourselves to others.

Paul Eggert: is the question of dealing with norms not necessarily restrictive?

Sue Kossew: the Damrosch Institute for World Literature has an interesting funding model. Universities are required to contribute \$1000 a year; that is, to contribute an amount to the group's existence. If the amount is small this might work.

Anthony Uhlmann: we can link the group to the Academy as a way of moving forward next year for developing it further.

Brigita Olubas: we need some junior people too.

Helen Groth: we should move some things: firstly, that there is an annual heads of department meeting.

Lyn McCredden: yes, we need to develop working parties.

Helen Groth: we should call for expressions of interest to consult on issues.

Mandy Treagas: we need to agree on some things today.

Helen Groth: an annual meeting of heads of department is a good idea, yes?

AGREEMENT FROM FLOOR

Helen Groth: how?

Lyn McCredden: I've a question with regard to what we do here. My first responsibility is to my own University. Is the role of this body to make uniform what English is and does in various institutions?

Helen Groth: Universities are competitive.

Nicole Moore: one of the roles of the body is to protect us from TEXA audits: this is the body sets of standards of support.

Ken Gelder: one of the interesting questions in the Ernst and Young Report that presents the future landscape of universities involves competing for disciplinary expertise. Universities can lose disciplines. Universities measure expertise. If you set up norms there is a risk of every program competing with every other. We need to think about what we can do differently and seek to open up the discipline rather than seeking to normalise the discipline or tie it to the National Curriculum

Paul Giles: one of the advantages of the MLA is that it has professionalized the discipline. It has developed a series of professional norms; in working conditions, casualisation, tenure. It is able to intervene with regard to bad university practice. They have some force in their interventions, their complaints about universities have an ethical impact. They are able to help set norms and professional standards and can set up liaison with other bodies. There is a different set of expectations, the MLA set standards, resolutions are voted on, the secretary will write to people about this or that, things are made public and it is able to apply moral pressure. It creates normative expectations academics become part of a wider body.

Paul Eggert: in the UK the QAA has developed a series of disciplinary benchmarks from 2000 to 2007. Revisions are done by subject specialization. The point of the norms is to benchmark broad principles rather than being prescriptive. Once we need a statement like the UK's QAA to come up with a similar model

Helen Groth: subject benchmark statements are important. We need an executive prepared to organise this process. People who can take charge.

Robert Phiddian: we need an institutional context for funding. We need admin.

Paul Magee: in Cultural Studies there is a conference, but all executive functions are voluntary. You need office staff in order to do certain things.

Paul Eggert: I propose that any institution that can house an office be offered the opportunity to do so. Whoever comes in first will host the organization.

Peter Otto: annual meetings could be workshops where attendees come prepared to consider topics. We need website, email list, dropbox.

Helen Groth: we need working groups and we also need a larger group to progress the whole.

Three Working groups

1 on Tertiary and secondary curriculum

2 on benchmarking the discipline

3 funding

Anthony Uhlmann: we need a name that is easy to recognise from the outside. I think it is important to call ourselves Heads of English.

David Carter: I propose we're called Australian University Heads of English.

Helen Groth: it is proposed we meet at the next AAH.

Graham Tulluch: it is proposed the current working party move things forward and manage the process for the next year.