

From REF to TEF

Chair's Report 2015

It has been a quiet year for CUCD.

That is usually good news, and it does seem to have been a good year for classics in British Universities. For the first year in a while CUCD has not been asked to get involved in campaigns to save departments from closure or destructive restructuring.

Indeed our subject continues to expand at university level. The revised constitution, agreed in November and now available on our splendid new [website](#), recognises the presence of classical subjects in universities which do not offer entire degree programmes. Taking full members and associate members together we now represent 36 institutions. Last year we celebrated Winchester offering degrees in ancient history and archaeology. This coming year Southampton and Manchester Metropolitan will do the same. New degrees seem to grow where students have already enjoyed taking classical courses. This new growth is a tribute to the inspirational work of teachers in universities and before that in schools as well.

If you are reading this, it follows you have located the new website and the new look Bulletin which went live in January. But this is a good moment to thank those who set it up especially our long-standing Webmaster Nick Lowe, Valerie James at the ICS, and our Bulletin Editor Susan Deacy. Subject Associations are all about communication: this will make a real difference. We would be glad of suggestions for other things we and/or the ICS could do to make it more useful yet. Several articles in this and recent Bulletins testify to the energetic work of the Education Committee, now working very closely with the Classical Association's teaching board. To all those who have organized events, panels at the CA conferences and have kept an eye on how changes in school teaching of classical languages and subjects may impact on university programmes, many thanks.

CUCD officers and the standing committee have continued playing our part across the HE landscape. December saw the final approval of [the revised QAA benchmarking statement](#). January saw the publication of Geoffrey Crossick's [report for HEFCE on Open Access and Monographs](#) to which we contributed. We also contributed to OFQUAL's consultation about AS and A levels in ancient languages, and with the Classical Association wrote to the Times expressing our concern about decoupling the AS and A levels (so students in the lower sixth could not be taught together on those courses) and also about changes to the GCSE Latin syllabus. In May we were asked, at very short notice, to contribute to an evaluation commissioned by the British Academy into the value of the [BASIS institutions](#). Every university department that responded to our rather rushed consultation stressed the huge value of the British schools in Athens, Rome and Ankara in supporting research and graduate education in particular. We await the report of Professor Warry's Evaluation committee.

The big news this year, of course, was the publication of the REF results. There were no huge surprises here – ours is a fairly stable discipline and, as Robin Osborne the Panel Chair stressed when he spoke about the results to Standing Committee in

June, Classics does not really have a tail in the way some subjects do. Good news again? Except it seems an increasingly expensive form of regular health check, and not just in financial terms: more on that [elsewhere in this Bulletin](#).

What about the year to come?

There is a great deal of uncertainty in the sector as a whole, of course, with a comprehensive spending review scheduled before Christmas that promises huge cuts to most government departments. It might take a few months before we know how cuts are passed on the Funding Councils, and what they intend to do about them. Meanwhile Sir Paul Nurse is conducting [a review into the Research Councils](#). Commissioned by the Coalition Government it will report imminently to its Conservative successor. The general election brought with it a new Business Secretary, Sajid Javid MP and a new Minister of State for Universities and Science, Jo Johnson MP. In his [first major speech](#) he announced:

my priority as Universities Minister will be to make sure students get the teaching they deserve and employers get graduates with the skills they need by introducing the Teaching Excellence Framework we promised in our manifesto.

Part of our work next year will be to contribute to discussions about what form the TEF will take. We are promised that it will be light touch and not bureaucratic but will involve some kind of external review. But we do not yet have answers to even basic questions such as Will panels of university teachers be involved as well as metrics? Or will the devolved administrations choose to participate? At present the Funding Councils for England, Wales and Northern Ireland (but not Scotland) are [consulting on teaching quality assurance and the external examiner system](#). But their steering group is not discussing the TEF, and there is no sense yet of how the two sets of reforms will fit together (they promise that they will).

Some REF survivors will doubtless be tempted to respond with Dorothy Parker's words "What fresh Hell can this be?" On the other hand, the huge success of classics courses at the moment shows that some competent assessors – our students – think we are doing something right. It will be important to get that message across in the TEF.

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