

πάντα ρεῖ, *or* The Phoney War

CHAIR'S REPORT 2016

This has been another good year for Classics in UK universities. The development of Ancient History at Manchester Metropolitan University is documented in this issue, and its reappearance at Southampton and Lancaster was recorded last year. Our courses are popular and there has been a steady stream of new appointments across the country. Everywhere there are conferences and workshops. Preparations are well advanced for the next Congress of [FIEC](#), the International Federation of Associations of Classical Studies which will take place on 5th-8th July 2019 in London. It will be held in conjunction with that year's Classical Association conference and sponsored by London colleges and universities, the Hellenic and Roman Societies and the ICS. We should have something to show the world.

Our collective success rests on a much wider base. I spoke at five local Classical Association branches this year, two of them based in universities which no longer teach classical degrees. There is no doubt of the enduring enthusiasm for our subjects. Just as important for the long term sustainability of the discipline is a modest expansion in chances to [train to teach classics in schools](#). We hope for more good news there too. The [Classical Association](#) has been providing powerful support for teaching in schools in a number of ways, most recently with its new Open Access [Journal of Classics Teaching](#). The CA Teaching Board works closely with the CUCD Teaching Committee to make sure school and university teaching and syllabuses remain joined up. Meanwhile [Classics for All](#) in its first five years has given more than half a million pounds in grants to support classics in state schools. Many departments are doing more and more in the way of outreach: [Classics in Communities](#) is a model for us all. Beyond formal education we know how much is being done by those who bring classics to the general public. Mary Beard, Daisy Dunn, William Fitzgerald, Edith Hall, Natalie Haynes, Charlotte Higgins, Tom Holland, Bettany Hughes, Harry Mount and Michael Scott are just some of those who have given their time and energy to promoting Classics. We have many other friends too. No-one is complacent, but we are the envy of our colleagues in many other humanities disciplines.

If there are causes for concern they lie beyond Classics and in some respects beyond the Humanities as a whole. When I wrote [last year's report](#) it was against the background of a new government and the announcement of the TEF, and we were expecting the imminent results of the Comprehensive Spending Review and Sir Paul Nurse's review of the research councils. Probably most of us had expected to know more by now of the direction in which HE would be travelling. Details of exactly how the TEF will work are still unclear. The future HE landscape is still only dimly visible in the [White Paper](#) published in May. Many familiar institutions will be torn down

and new ones constructed in their place: funding councils and research councils will disappear, at least in their present form. The future of QAA was uncertain even before the White Paper with some of its roles put out for competitive tendering and disagreement about whether the new Office for Students would need its help to run the REF. [The Stern Report](#) recommends major changes to the REF planned for 2020 at the earliest. Much of this still waits for legislation in Parliament, where the size of the government's majority is small.

We still do not know how much difference all this will make. Are we watching familiar patterns of acronymic drift? Or is something tectonic underway? It does not look as if the distinctively British level of high regulation over assessment will change any time soon. My US colleagues cannot believe that no term paper can be graded here without the participation of two faculty within the university, subjected to scrutiny from a colleague from outside it, all operating under institutional quality assurance regimes which are themselves periodically assessed from without and revised from within. Subject level TEF looks unlikely to hit us until 2019-2020. There is not much preparation classicists can make for that until we know more. Equally we do not know how much difference the appearance of UKRI, the new unitary body to fund research and innovation across the entire sector, will make to the Arts and Humanities. Will the new head of AHRC simply be allowed to get on with funding excellent research, relieved of the tiresome business of talking to ministers and civil servants by her or his line manager? Or will there be constant pressure to converge, harmonize and achieve economies of scale of the kind that created the disastrous Shared Services Facility? A number of key bodies are currently run by interim CEOs, and some have become very uncommunicative. Planning blight seems inevitable.

Meanwhile Brexit introduces all sorts of new uncertainties.¹ In a back to the future moment Research and Teaching now find themselves in separate ministries as a consequence of the new Prime Minister's reorganization of government departments. There are potential pluses. The dislocation between school and university teaching recently led an HE minister in BIS to lobby with the help of the Russell Group for changes to exam syllabuses that fell under the remit of the Department of Education. That should not recur. On the other hand, research-teaching linkages and the tug of love between REFward and TEFward facing strategies inside universities might not be helped by the departmental uncoupling. At the moment, thank goodness, we have the same minister - Jo Johnson - based in both departments, briefing two Secretaries of State. A good temporary fix, perhaps, but universities maybe need something a bit more stable. As for Brexit itself, anecdotal evidence suggests uncertainty about the UK's future scientific relationship with the EU is already affecting recruitment of academic staff, and also bids for international collaboration under Horizon 2020 and other programmes. It is certainly having a negative effect on the morale of our colleagues here who happen to have citizenship in other European countries, and on the morale of those of us who value and care for them. What impact Brexit will have on student recruitment is another uncertainty. Most of the UK is already a very expensive place to study [compared to other EU countries](#). And fees for Home (and at the moment other EU) students in England and Wales. We know everything will change. But not how, and not when, so mostly we carry on as normal. We are living and working through a phoney war.

¹ Some helpful guidance and comment is available from [Universities UK](#), from the [European Universities Association](#), from [WONKHE](#) and, with a particular agenda to promote continuing collaboration, from [Scientists for EU](#).

The term Phoney War referred to the months of relative calm between the moment when France and the UK went to war with Nazi Germany and the first major hostilities. A few shots were fired all the same.

During the last year the main cause of concern to CUCD was the proposal to phase out the core funding allocated by government through the British Academy to the [BASIS Schools and Institutes](#), the British Schools in Athens and Rome, The British Institutes at Ankara, in East Africa, and of Persian Studies, the Council for British Research in the Levant, based in Amman and East Jerusalem, and the Society for Libyan Studies. Many of us have sent our students to take courses at them, or visited ourselves to carry out research, or have been involved through them in collaborations with local researchers and other foreign institutes. The BASIS institutes also support research and cultural activities in fields as diverse as Anthropology, Geography, History, Prehistory and Fine Art. Originally independent each has a different mission, different resources and different focuses of activity. Some raise considerable funds from other sources, others manage on a shoe-string. Some work in very challenging local environments too.

Much remains mysterious about how the threat to their core funding came about. The Worry Report, for which we were waiting this time last year, was never published. The summary, released by the Academy only with reluctance, shows it to be deeply flawed and misinformed: this might have been expected given the very short time in which it was composed, the small amount of evidence collected and the conduct of the enquiry. The decision was made in the context of preparations for what was expected to be a very tough Comprehensive Spending Review, in the midst of larger negotiations in which much was achieved for UK science. It was also made by a very small group of people, so that the Academy Council and the BASIS committee were unaware of what was going on until quite a late stage. The milk has been split, but it would be good to be sure milk bottles will be handled with more care in the future.

Happily that threat has been withdrawn, at least for the next four years. A great deal of lobbying by universities, learned societies and subject associations, parliamentarians, former diplomats and especially by Fellows of the Academy led to a reversal of that decision. Things look a little better for the future. It is a good sign that the Academy's CEO has now visited the Schools in both Athens and Rome, and expressed his desire to visit others. Yet there remains much uncertainty about the details of what the Schools will be allowed or encouraged to do in the future, and about matters of governance. From the outside there seem to be mixed messages coming from the Academy, on the one hand wanting to exercise more strategic control, and on the other wanting to remove "British Academy Sponsored" from their description. Watch this space!

CUCD consulted over the Schools and following the response we had from classical departments we pressed the case for continued funding very hard. We made common cause with other members of the Arts and Humanities Alliance. This group brings together learned societies and subject associations more or less across the subject range funded by AHRC (with the exception of performing arts) and speaks for about half the range covered by the British Academy (the other half being the Social Sciences). AHA is all the more important given that the AHRC and the Academy are consulting less and less at the moment. It is more than a year since the last AHRC town meeting: no new one has been announced. The last meeting of the Academy's HSS Learned Societies and Subject Associations Network Meeting was on 2nd December: but a discussion of the Comprehensive Spending Review at that meeting was cancelled just a day before. No attempt was made to consult during the preparation of the White Paper. AHA has been led with great energy for the last few

years by Professor Peter Mandler who is now stepping down. We all owe him a great deal, and must work closely with his successors.

CUCD also has some other thanks to make. At the November Council Miriam Leonard stepped down as Treasurer and Ulrike Roth as Statistics Officer. These are vital and fiddly jobs, and we are very fortunate that they (and their successors Elena Isabel and Sharon Marshall) have been willing to take them on.

Statistics in particular are vital when making a case to select committees and the like. They also enable us to get a better sense of the health of the discipline. We intend to consider refining our questions to improve our understanding of gender in the profession too, spurred partly by another of this year's big success story, the launch of the [Women's Classical Committee UK](#), described elsewhere in this bulletin. The launch of WCC is a success story but much of what it has already uncovered about many women's experience in UK Classics makes sobering reading, especially read alongside the intersecting issues raised around the experience of [Early Career Researchers \(and Teachers\)](#). CUCD was created to defend classical departments and by extension the teaching of classical subjects in British Higher Education. Many of the "classical teachers in higher education" for whom we claim to speak and on whom all our departments rely are in very precarious circumstances. Our moral authority to speak truth to power when it comes to government agencies and university administrations will eventually be judged by how we keep our own house in order. There is more to be done here.

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