QUALITY ENHANCEMENT REVIEW OF DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH

5-6 June 2012

Membership of Review Panel

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Background

The Department of English comprises three main strands: English Literary Studies; Children’s Literature; and Creative Writing. All these fields have extensive research, HDR, and undergraduate and postgraduate teaching programs.

Purpose

To review a range of management, resourcing, and quality enhancement issues relating to research, HDR, academic, and community engagement programs.

Terms of Reference
1. Governance, Leadership and Management

Review the effectiveness of Department of English planning, leadership and management structure, processes and resources in responding to Faculty and University strategic planning directions.

*Commendations and Comments*

Effective leadership and management are evident in the universally positive responses of academic and professional staff interviewed, and in a variety of specific managerial and governance tasks. These range from the implementation of a standardised workload model and careful staff mentoring, through the introduction of capstone units for all majors and the staffing and oversight of important OUA initiatives, to the formulation of desired graduate attributes and capabilities, as well as the identification and implementation of processes for nurturing them.

The committee noted the inclusive nature of the leadership team within the Department of English and was impressed by the extent to which all staff engaged with the department beyond their own teaching responsibilities and research interests. Senior staff emphasised the importance of an inclusive approach, commitment, and maintaining communication through various channels, from regular departmental meetings to performance management sessions. In all respects, the Department appears a cohesive team with a clear leadership structure and a strong focus on the management of resources.

The Department of English is meeting or, in the case of HDR completions, exceeding the expectations of the Faculty. It has accepted the impetus to develop Open Universities Australia units, and is diligently working to ensure that students are familiar with the Masters of Research.
Recommendations

The review panel noted that the Department of English was not represented on the Faculty Research Committee and recommends that it immediately seek representation. Given the stated importance of research at Macquarie University, the panel considers participation in the Research Committee essential to ensure that academic staff are given the opportunity to engage fully in the process of research both at faculty and at university levels.

2. Academic Program

Review the appropriateness of the degrees, programs, and units offered by the Department of English relative to faculty and university priorities, employer and professional community demands.

Commendations and Comments

The review panel believes the Department has done everything it reasonably can to implement new programs and to follow and fulfil university initiatives.

The panel also recognizes the wide-range of rich, well-conceived subject offerings within the discipline. These provide students with an attractive array of choices, and staff with an opportunity to enrich their teaching through their research.

The proliferation of subject offerings is, however, a cause for concern. This is especially the case at MA level, where many units taught fail to meet standard university criteria for cost effectiveness. The financial shortfalls are often very considerable. The undergraduate offerings are also numerous and, in the view of some faculty members, perhaps excessive. On the other hand, the review panel noted that the number of units on offer reflects in part the diversity of the discipline, and heard repeatedly from students interviewed that this very diversity was an important factor
in their decision to study English. Nevertheless, the panel feels that these offerings, especially at postgraduate level, need to be reviewed.

Creative writing, in particular, drew the panel’s attention, both because of its vibrancy and because of evident staff difficulties in managing its numerous offerings and considerable enrolments. The review panel felt that one positive way of addressing this situation was to treat Creative Writing less as a potentially stand-alone discipline, than as one in which the education of, and creative options available to, students would be enhanced by increased, prescribed exposure to literary critical units. Implementation of such a change would, the panel recognises, be complicated by the fact that Creative Writings straddles various departments, but English can doubtless find a workable solution to this dilemma.

Finally, the review panel was impressed by the professional approach of the department to the university’s recent OUA initiative, and by potential future challenges which this new involvement brought with it. In the rapidly changing tertiary market-place, and as a means of enhancing the Department’s impact on and profile in the broader community, these offerings are unequivocally important. They also offer a new source of revenue that can be increased, as well as used creatively to enhance staff productivity in a variety of important ways. Nevertheless, the panel was concerned about the workloads currently experienced by those in charge of, and implementing, this new endeavour. Long periods of heavy teaching, together with a variety of associated on-line tasks, could impact adversely both the programs being taught and (almost certainly) the capacity of staff to engage in other productive activities, especially research. This situation should be monitored, compensated for, and addressed wherever possible.

**Recommendations**

That the Department review its unit offerings and seek to decrease them, especially at post-graduate level. The review panel recommends that this be done, wherever possible, in such a way as to produce synergies between the designated disciplinary strengths and core strands, and to facilitate broader, integrated offerings and collaborative teaching.
That the education of students in Creative Writing be strengthened through strongly recommended, better still compulsory, increased exposure to the Department’s literary critical offerings. This could perhaps be achieved most productively through increased pre- and co-requisite units drawn from the conventional English Literature units on offer.

To ensure equity and the continued high quality of the department’s OUA offerings, it is also recommended that all staff who offer units in this program be asked to take charge of their units once every three or four years. As a result, all staff will ‘own’ this program and realise what is involved in its implementation. In addition, quality assurance and revision will thereby be assured. At some date these will become issues for the University, and English Department practices may well be exemplary for the Faculty.

3. Research (Section A)

(Please see the end of this document for Section B)

Review current research outputs, activity, and capability relative to Faculty and University objectives including opportunities for developing research and knowledge leadership.

Commendations and Comments

The review panel acknowledges and commends the research activities of the English Department as an outstanding area of strength and accomplishment. There is no doubt that this one of the most research active Departments of English in Australia. Clear evidence of this appears in the 2011 QS international rankings, in which the Department of English at Macquarie University was ranked 40th in the world and 5th in Australia--in our view an outstanding and deserved achievement.
The panel commends the Department for its successful ARC discovery grants, and notes a modest improvement in the weighted publications per staff member from 2009 to 2010, as well as the fact that 93% of its staff are research active.

Research is obviously regarded as a central and crucial activity of this Department. The senior leadership actively encourages research and publications among members of staff. This takes the form of extensive mentoring and invaluable advice about potential publishing outlets and their career consequences. We note that a number of younger members of staff have monographs with publishing houses that are not of the first order. The review panel believes, however, that the publishing done in each case has been highly strategic, and is being viewed not only as an important part of the university’s output, but as a crucial first step in building towards a career as a first class and senior researcher. We commend this strategy and its publishing outcomes.

We noted with pleasure the healthy mix of staff commitments to their research and teaching, their colleagues and their students. However, greater efforts could still be made in the area of producing successful grant applications. Junior staff, in particular, need to be encouraged to seek research funding that will enable them to undertake sustained research activity. It cannot be too strongly emphasised that successful grant applications will be a vital part of their future career trajectory at Macquarie University and elsewhere. They will also contribute significantly to the future financial viability, well-being and status of the Department of English.

Recommendations

That the Department be more active in pursuing research grants both internally and externally. The panel feels that academics, especially junior staff, need to grasp the professional and strategic opportunities that would be opened to them through grants.

That the Department seriously consider drawing on external expertise in the preliminary stages of grant development and in the composition of grant applications. The review panel realises, of course, that academic departments are usually cash-strapped. This Department of English, however, is shortly to receive two considerable
financial sums as a result of its high rate of successful HD completions. Although some of this money is apparently ear-marked for specific purposes, we recommend that a large amount of the remaining sums be used to fund research, especially to promote and strengthen grant applications. Apart from drawing on external expertise, types of assistance could include teaching relief, research assistance and other support necessary to ensure the staff have the capacity to develop high quality grant applications.

There is a further important issue of the Faculty’s perception of the Department’s research performance. This is dealt with at the end of this report as Research (Section B). The views discussed here were those of only one member of staff, but given this person’s seniority, they are likely to carry weight in the wider Faculty, and influence decision-making processes and judgements. Hence they demand, and receive, serious consideration.

4. Research Training

Review the HDR program, including admission standards, methodology and skills training, completion times and drop-out rates, supervision and reporting standards.

Commendations and Comments

The review panel is pleased to confirm that the Department of English has strong research training practices, as well as an outstanding record of attracting students into HDR programs, and then mentoring and supporting these students through to timely and successful completion of the HDR process. Its HDR completion rates as a proportion of total enrolment, and completions within the four-year candidature, are well above statistical expectations.

Students at all levels, from undergraduate through to post-graduate, seem well informed about the function of programs, new faculty initiatives, and the various forms of university assistance available to them.
A major factor in this outstanding performance is the very real, and at times almost palpable inspiration imparted to undergraduates of this Department, and the intellectual attraction and respect engendered in students by their lecturers. This often leads to the successful retention of promising students into Honours, then HDR programs. According to students, staff are passionate about their subject, vitally engaged in their research, and able to impart this in an extremely positive fashion. ‘Passionate’ and ‘inspiring’ were words often used by students to describe the Department’s staff, who were also praised for their approachability and willingness to address student concerns, interests and questions.

Also impressive was what, for want of a better word, could be described as the Department’s holistic approach to its discipline and academic activities. The focus of the Department of English is not simply on meeting the basic requirements necessary to obtain a degree, but on conveying a genuine understanding of, and enthusiasm for, the discipline. This is buttressed by strong methodological underpinnings and excellent mentorship, which produces not only a commendable record of successful HDR completions, but a steady flow of publications based on these dissertations. Through this excellent HDR training students learn how their research can be most profitably used and disseminated, they gain the skills necessary to become independent and productive researchers, and they achieve solid career outcomes in a variety of areas, as well as in a number of highly regarded Departments of English in Australia and overseas.

Recommendations

That the Department take steps to promote greater cohesiveness and networks among its higher degree students. At the very least students within the discipline should know each other and be familiar with the research challenges, experience and findings of their peers. This could be achieved through informal social functions, or through more structured efforts such as a series of postgraduate meetings and presentations, or (best of all) through a combination of both. Presentations need not be restricted to a particular student’s research, but could focus on issues, such as recent publications
and debates, of general interest to graduates of this discipline, and integral to its knowledge base.

5. Staff and Student Profile

Review the alignment of academic, professional, and student profile relative to current and future objectives and plans.

Commendations and Comments

The English Department is to be commended for its documented achievement of student learning outcomes, the high rating of all its programs in LEU and LET surveys, and for its successful implementation of comprehensive OUA offerings. It is also to be commended for strong retention rates into 200- and 300-level units and for a sustained record of strong recruitment into its HDR program. Important factors contributing to these successes are the expertise and infectious enthusiasm of staff, as well as ongoing efforts to update course offerings and their contents, as witnessed recently in important innovations made to the teaching of Australian Literature, or in a new course on ‘Pulitzers, Bookers and Nobels: Prize-Winning Books’.

The review panel noted the strategic appointment of several younger staff at level B, and was impressed by their innovative and enthusiastic approach to curriculum development and teaching. They also revealed a strong sense of the need to construct a research trajectory. The mentoring and training of these new scholars is of the highest importance. They are the future of this Department, and should make significant contributions to the faculty and broader university community.

Staffing seems adequate to meet current university objectives, but there are areas of potential shortfall that require careful monitoring and forward planning. Creative Writing, Children’s Literature and the OUA program are all in danger of work-overload, while the attention of the review panel was drawn to a putative need to strengthen expertise in diverse areas of Twentieth Century and Contemporary Literary Studies, such as American Literature and Postcolonial Literature.
The panel also believes there is an urgent need for strategic succession planning. Currently there is a stark preponderance of junior over senior staff. While this helps the Department’s budgetary position, it puts considerable strain on the few senior staff who have to teach, research, manage and mentor—all part of an academic’s ‘trade’, but there are limits to what the efforts of one or two dedicated individuals can achieve. This situation will be exacerbated by retirements in coming years, and cannot be met by a policy of appointments at the lowest salary levels.

Finally, the panel’s attention was drawn to the preponderance of staff members whose academic training had been exclusively at Macquarie University, or who held PhDs from this institution. While we recognise that the recent additions to this department were worthy appointments, and that this ‘preponderance’ is one manifestation of the strong research culture of the Department of English, the review panel is of the belief that this department would be enriched, and its performance possibly enhanced in a number of areas, if it were able to draw more broadly on experience gained at other first-rate tertiary institutions.

Recommendations

That in future greater flexibility be shown and permitted in the level at which positions are advertised, and that the possibility of re-advertising positions be entertained to strengthen potential selection pools.

That when key senior staff retire, appointments be made at levels higher than B of academics with a strong research track-record, who can contribute significantly and diversely to the Department’s research profile.

That the Department actively seek to appoint beyond its own graduates.
6. Community Engagement

Review the scale, scope, and quality of community/industry engagement, including external/professional contribution to and referencing of, curriculum and research development.

Commendations and Comments

The review panel notes the active involvement of academic staff in a wide range of professional and community organisations. It is also aware that the English Department has in the past been active in outreach lecture programs which position Macquarie’s English Department as a vibrant place of ideas and social engagement.

The panel commends the Department, in particular, for external engagements which attest to public and official recognition of its expertise in research and teaching. Individual staff serve, for instance, as readers for national and international journals, for the Australian Research Council, or as members of the National Curriculum Committee and the NSW Board of Studies, or as external examiners and expert advisers, both nationally and internationally. They also participate in, or are members of, esteemed learned bodies, such as the Australian Academy of the Humanities, the Australasian Association of Writing Programs and the International Society of Anglo-Saxonists, and they enjoy strong international standing in areas such as Early Modern Studies and Children’s Literature.

The Department is also to be commended for its efforts to disseminate its research and disciplinary knowledge in the wider community, as well as to more narrowly targeted audiences, such as high school teachers and pupils. This serves to enrich individual lives, to enhance the reputation of both the Department of English and Macquarie University, and as an effective means of enrolment recruitment.
Recommendations

That the Department of English seek to brand itself distinctively and to make known its achievements in a more deliberate and obvious way, both within and outside the university. To this end, the panel recommends that the Department consider ways of showcasing its research output, perhaps through a series of well-advertised public lectures, which might focus on topics arising from publications and research. In addition, it might use the on-line environment to showcase its publications, complementing these with podcasts of lectures or discussions by the researchers whose books are on display.

That the English Department explore new ways of engaging with the community and other relevant stakeholders. These could include constituting an Advisory Committee that would both represent stakeholders’ views of English as a discipline and facilitate meaningful links with members of the community, who have a professional interest in English. Depending upon its membership, such a committee might also undertake the role of advocate of the discipline beyond the university, or seek to enhance the potential vocational outcomes and placements available for English graduates.

That the Department seek to develop further activities that will enable its work in teaching and research to be highlighted effectively and given prominence in the public domain, as well as within the University.

7. Future Directions

Recommend future development opportunities for the Department of English in terms of its resources, research, teaching and community/industry engagement activity.

The review panel finds that in terms of the stated overview and aims (SER p12) the English Department is strongly placed and has provided clear evidence of its success in achieving its aims. Certainly its current students and graduates are unanimous in their commendation of the teaching staff and of the research support offered at all levels. A Department ranked 40th in the QS and 5th in Australia is clearly doing many
key things, and generally performing, very well. The panel also notes the stated Strategic Aims and Planning (SER p. 17—19 and the Goals asserted (p. 42-43) and acknowledges that this Department understands the challenges ahead. One of the most important of these is for a small department to sustain its effort and build in creative ways for the future.

Much will depend on careful planning for the long-term research strength and leadership within the Department. The panel has noted the recruitment of young, energetic and enthusiastic researchers and teachers, and has commented on the need to support these staff deliberately and effectively so that their research potential can flourish. However, it is also important, indeed imperative, that the Department recruit at the highest level and be strategic in human resource management of retirements and staff changes in order to continue its dominance in key teaching and research areas.

• The panel therefore recommends a deliberate and strategic plan for recruiting high profile researchers to carry leadership of research in the Department of English into the future.

The English Department has determined that a major plank in building its future involves expanding the OUA presence, as this is a financially beneficial approach to building and managing scarce resources, as well as a key area that the Faculty wishes to expand and consolidate. The panel commends the Department for the way it has thus far managed the process. It notes with concern, however, that the OUA student load is not calculated in EFTSL load. Staff workload data therefore needs to be judiciously scrutinised both internally, to ensure equity, and by the university when strategic planning occurs, so that the department not be disadvantaged, should it continue to increase the OUA component of its operations. The panel has noted above that due consideration be given to the way the workload for the OUA UG courses is distributed, so that a fair and even balance is achieved for all staff involved. It notes also that that PG awards, particularly the Children’s Literature strand and two Creative Writing units, already have a strong on-line presence that caters for off-campus students. Aligning the PG on-line presence with the development of the Masters of Research should now take priority for staff engagement and development. This is an opportunity for asserting the research strengths of the Department.
The panel recommends that the Literature and Creative Writing strands at PG level be judiciously reviewed and prepared for an increased on-line presence, but with due consideration of the workload of staff teaching in these courses.

The review panel is aware that the English Department is a small and self-contained operation within the University. It is likely that, despite an acknowledged history of difficult disciplinary relations, there is now room for developing a more substantial involvement with disciplines such as Media, Communication and Cultural Studies. The panel notes the shared UG Writing major and also an embryonic research collaboration with the Media staff. The panel sees opportunities for further collaboration with other complementary disciplines. Collaborative research and a creative approach to using the research strengths of the English Department with other disciplines at Macquarie should strengthen opportunities for competitive grant success, and could lead as well to the creation of innovative course offerings. In relation to future recruitment, it might be advantageous to seek high level scholars who have the capacity to develop and lead research collaborations across these disciplines. This would also enable a renewed and strengthened community/industry engagement with communication professionals and organisations.

The panel recommends that the Department of English seek further synergies and enhanced collaboration with other relevant disciplines both in teaching and research.

Finally, the review panel has noted the need for the English Department to increase its student load and to ‘sell’ its research and teaching strengths in both its UG and PG courses. While the OUA courses offer one way of doing this, it is important for the department that its UG student load increase. It was noted by several staff that English as a discipline by title is often difficult to promote as students and the public generally bring to it perceptions based on their high school experience. On the other hand, some possible advantages may flow from discipline ‘recognition’, while the familiar name is easy to align with categories used in international ranking surveys. Nevertheless, the panel warmly commends sporadic, current efforts within the department to rename individual courses so that they better reflect the dynamics of disciplinary changes in Literary Studies and Creative Writing. This might be contemplated for the Macquarie
Department as a whole, so as to encompass and reflect the range of its activities, re-badging it perhaps as the Department of Literature and Writing, or the Department of English: Literature and Writing.

*The panel therefore recommends that staff seriously discuss the possibility of renaming the Department to establish a public profile that better reflects its core activities and, if possible, its strengths in research and teaching.

3. Research (Section B)

It is now the review panel’s unpleasant, but very necessary duty to turn to detailed charges levelled at the research culture of the English Department, both in a written submission and in interview, by a senior member of the Macquarie Faculty of Arts. The panel wishes to stress that these charges were the utterances of a single member of staff, and that they were completely isolated: that is, they were not corroborated at all by other senior members of Faculty. In general, the latter had nothing but praise for the Department’s outcomes, and especially for its HDR management. Members of the review panel have never encountered such a potentially damning document as this submission. They felt keenly their responsibility to investigate its charges as fully as possible. The charges were so extreme as to suggest either the complete incompetence of, or gross dereliction of duty by, senior members of the Department, or serious misjudgement and/or bias on the part of the staff member making the claims. We could write pages in response to these claims but will endeavour to be as concise as possible. The panel’s response is in two parts: to the claims themselves and then to the supporting documents tabled by the member of Faculty at the interview.

The charges may be summarized as follows: allegedly the English Department lacks a coherent research strategy, lacks a culture of research collaboration, is devoid of a capacity for strategic research thinking, and of understanding of how research quality is assessed. It has little interest in demonstrating research excellence and is incompetent in its mentoring process and strategies. It is also self-protective and insular to the point of driving its most promising staff away, of being virtually unable to recruit externally and, perhaps worse still, of condemning its own graduates/staff
members to inescapable mediocrity within the Department’s own blinkered walls. And there is much more of the same. The document submitted to the review panel concludes that the Department’s future, its more junior staff, will ‘have little chance of [future] success because they have no experience of a Department with a serious research culture’.

The review panel found no persuasive substantiation of these charges.

Instead our findings suggested that these charges reflected a repeated pattern of misjudgement and/or misrepresentation. When it was possible to present material in a partial and damaging fashion, this was done. When a variety of possible interpretations were possible, the most extreme and negative verdict was drawn. Rarely was an opportunity missed to denigrate the department’s achievements and practices.

For instance, it was stated damningly that the two new staff applications in the most recent round had failed. The Department’s past successes in this area, however, were passed over in silence. Much was made of the department’s tendency to publish in allegedly low ranked journals. No mention was made of the fact that the categories being used by the Faculty member have since been abandoned in the ERA process because of their flawed and unreliable nature. On a different note, it was claimed that ‘second time applications are sometimes worse than original ones’. In context, this charge points unmistakably to incompetent leadership and advice received. In fact, in the one case traceable where a university committee actually preferred an earlier to a later submission, it was because the candidate had changed his original proposal entirely, and university evaluators felt the first more likely to attract funding. The candidate himself explained this to the review panel, but clearly believed that his second project was a far more important one to which he could passionately commit his time and considerable energies.

Similarly, the panel found that PhD completions were not only very good, but that the publications flowing from them are of real substance and strategically planned. One supervisor alone has had ten theses turned into monographs, and seven graduates placed in lectureships or higher university positions, often at institutions that far
outrank Macquarie University. Others within the department have also performed extremely well as supervisors and research mentors, balancing sagely the need to get research published before it is dated and when it can genuinely help a young, potential academic’s career, against the protracted, often-career stunting, waiting periods associated with publication in the world’s most prestigious outlets. Without exception junior staff interviewed were overwhelmingly positive about the mentoring, leadership and advice received from senior colleagues in the department to assist their applications and research.

We also found abundant evidence that staff collaborate informally and formally, in a discipline that has traditionally encouraged individual rather than team projects. This positive practice, which is an important component of the Department’s research culture, was witnessed most clearly in the many cases where academics editing a significant volume have apparently encouraged colleagues to make submissions to it, to assume joint responsibilities or otherwise participate in a common project. Such submissions, of course, were subject to rigorous and independent review, and attest to the building of areas of research strength that also feed directly into the Department’s teaching program. The review panel noted, however, that further, apparently unexplored opportunities existed for less traditional research projects that would involve collaborative work, related perhaps to teaching or on-line practices, and that these could afford grant opportunities in future.

To go on rebutting point by point the charges levelled at the department would make tedious reading and might suggest a determination to belittle at all costs the judgment of the submission maker. This we decline to do. A similar determination, however, emerges from this submission’s concerted attack on the English Department, and is deeply worrying to the review panel.

Such judgments and views must necessarily be highly detrimental to the Department’s research standing and prospects within the Faculty. Their effects could be numerous and frequent, influencing the views of senior management, making OSP or grant applications problematical, etc.
The review panel formed a far different and very positive view of the English Department’s research culture. This view is supported by the recent, very high QS ranking of the department as 40 internationally—a highly commendable result which complements our findings. Overall, members of the English Department seem passionately committed to their research, and see it, together with teaching, as the Department’s major, unquestionable achievement. The panel believes their views are well founded, and any suggestion of a lack of mature research culture to be, quite frankly, ludicrous.

The review panel is therefore at a loss to explain what seemed to it the pronounced personal animus directed against the Department and its senior staff in this submission, but felt that this was so unmistakable that the panel has serious doubts about the Faculty member’s capacity to deal impartially with research issues related to the English Department. Panel members urged their chairman to present these concerns in person to the Dean of the Arts Faculty. He felt the Dean would read this report and decide on an appropriate course of action, but joins other panel members in insisting that its findings not be disregarded.

Addendum to the sections on Research.

The following addendum is necessarily inconclusive in part, but serves to substantiate the above, considered assessment of the review panel. Material was deposited with the committee to support the negative claims made by the faculty member. It consisted primarily of:

(a) applications to receive grants as subsidies towards the cost of publishing monographs
(b) applications to receive new staff research grants (as well as in one case an application for a start-up grant for academic staff returning from parental leave)
(c) an application for external funding in the form of a DECRA grant.
(d) and a photocopy of a monograph authored by the DECRA.
The documents were thoroughly perused and the following conclusions reached. The documents in category A confirmed the Faculty member’s claim—a claim never doubted by the review panel—that the English Department had been active in applying for grants of this category in accordance with Macquarie University guidelines. The panel, however, diverges from the senior faculty member in its evaluation of this exercise. Requests for publication subsidies, whether for books or articles, are not unusual in the Humanities, and prevalent in the Sciences. Indeed the existence of the Macquarie University Arts Publication Subsidy Grant scheme seems to confirm official recognition of this fact. A number of successful applications from English for these competitive grants would therefore seem to testify to research strengths in the department, not to the alleged weakness.

Furthermore, this surmise was confirmed by the material supplied. This consisted mainly of examiners’ reports and correspondence with publishers. There was nothing in this material which suggested in the slightest that these former theses were not worthy of publication, or that they would reflect badly on their author or on his or her home institution. In fact examiners’ comments, by and large, were very positive, even flattering, like that of Professor G.W. Boughton of the University of Durham: ‘Were this a characteristic PhD Viva in England I would pick on a number of fascinating passages and expect a rewarding conversation. I would in fact very much like to keep the thesis in England to be lodged in Durham University Library pending its electronic publication online in due course, as the material chosen is both original and illuminating in its method’. Scholarship has apparently been well served by these publications, and the award of a grant subsidy is further testimony to this fact.

With regard to categories B & C the review panel cannot speak with the same assurance. A reading of these applications reveals neither unworthy projects nor applicants devoid of research merit. It is, however, notoriously difficult to judge applications in isolation from their larger field, or in the case of C a single application. The panel must therefore defer to the standard evaluation processes. The evident work put into these applications, together with their evaluation, however, provides the basis for a potentially invaluable learning experience for each applicant. These early career academics need, and deserve, expert mentoring and guidance, and the review panel
felt strongly that this should be the responsibility of the Arts Faculty Research office, or a member of the Arts Faculty employed specifically with expertise in this area. It is all too easy to criticize or pick holes in the work of others. Helping and teaching are far harder, and should not simply be the responsibility of overworked senior academics who need to be productive themselves. We have actually suggested that, should such help not be forthcoming from the Arts Faculty Research office, the English Department consider employing part-time an expert to assist staff members in the preparation of applications.

These early career researchers have obviously worked long and hard on their applications. They have treated application writing as a serious business. Their treatment to date by the Arts Faculty seems more likely to discourage them from making further research applications than to encourage and strengthen further endeavours in this direction. It would be a great pity if, in future, they felt that writing grant applications was likely to be a waste of precious research time, and decided to pursue their research without applying for grants. The Faculty needs to be pro-active to prevent this, and supply more comprehensive training assistance to increase its rate of successful grant applications.

With regard to D, a photocopy of the complete text of Women in Revolutionary Debate: From Burney to Austen was passed to the chair of the review panel for evaluation as he is a recognised international authority in its field: Romanticism. In his judgment this monograph represents a substantial contribution to scholarship of the period, one that should provide a springboard for further grant applications, and one that focuses on an area that could form the basis of important collaborative endeavours within the English Department, where there is considerable interest in the presentation of families, domestic space and related ideological issues. Again the senior Faculty member has a different opinion of this work’s merit. Professor Ackland seriously wonders if the submission-maker has actually read this monograph from cover to cover, as he now has, and leaves it to the reader of this document to decide whose judgment carries more specialist weight in this instance.