

Research Assessment Exercise 2001

Report from the Linguistics Panel (UoA 56)

0. Introduction

This report is intended to provide feedback to the Linguistics community on the conduct and outcome of the 2001 Research Assessment Exercise.

1. Basic statistics

▪ Number of institutions submitting to Panel 56	24
▪ Number of staff submitted:	
Category A and A*	214
Category C	11
▪ Number of publications cited	845

2. The Panel and other assessors

The Chair was elected by the members of the 1996 Panel. Panel members were drawn mainly from nominations provided to HEFCE by the subject bodies: the Linguistics Association of Great Britain, the Philological Society, the British Association of Applied Linguistics, the British Association of Academic Phoneticians and the British Association of Clinical Linguistics (formerly CPLA). These associations sent senior officers to a meeting at the British Academy, chaired by Professor John Laver as chair of the Linguistics and Philology Section, who then sent an agreed list of nominations to HEFCE. As in previous exercises the Panel included an overseas member.

The 2001 Panel was: Greville G. Corbett* (Surrey, Chair), John Local (York, vice-chair), Robert Borsley (Bangor/Essex), Jennifer Cheshire (Queen Mary, University of London), Heinz Giegerich (Edinburgh), Shalom Lappin (SOAS/Kings College London), Michael Perkins (Sheffield), Stephen Pulman* (Cambridge/Oxford) Andrew Radford* (Essex), Ben Rampton (Thames Valley/Kings College London) and Elizabeth Traugott* (Stanford).

Note: * indicates a member of the 1996 Panel; double affiliations indicate 'affiliation when appointed'/'current affiliation'.

The secretariat consisted of Karel Thomas (Loughborough), assisted by Tania Slade (HEFCE).

The external observer was Peter Linthwaite (ESRC).

The Phonetics Sub-panel consisted of John Local (chair), Heinz Giegerich, William Hardcastle (Queen Margaret University College, Edinburgh) and Peter Ladefoged (University of California at Los Angeles).

The Linguistics Panel was also assisted by Specialist Advisors and an International Panel, as described below.

3. Consultation and criteria

The Panel spent three full day meetings in preparation for the exercise, including drawing up a set of draft criteria. These were published (August 1999 as document RAE 4/99) with an invitation for comment. All responses were considered by a full meeting of the Panel, and revised criteria were published (December 1999 as document RAE 5/99). The Panel was careful in adhering fully to the criteria as published.

4. The assessment procedure

As in previous exercises the main criterion by which the Panel operated was the quality of the work cited and the activities described, regardless of the sub-field, the size of the unit or the previous reputation of researchers or units. All Panel members read all submissions.

Reading of the works cited in RA2 was divided among the Panel members. In some instances there was work which the Panel did not feel fully competent to assess and for such items either another Panel was asked

for an assessment, or a Specialist Advisor was appointed. The Panels from whom advice was sought were: 11, Other Studies and Professions Allied to Medicine; 46, Middle Eastern and African Studies; 47, Asian Studies; 49, Celtic Studies; 50, English Language and Literature; 51, French; 52, German; Dutch and Scandinavian Studies; 55, Iberian and Latin American Languages; 57, Classics, Ancient History, Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies. All referrals requested by institutions were made.

The Specialist Advisors appointed were: Professor Susan Bassnett (Warwick), Professor Rosamund Mitchell (Southampton), Professor Alan Davies (Edinburgh), Professor Giulio Lepschy (Reading), Professor Timothy McNamara (Melbourne). Advisors were asked to read from five up to fifteen items.

The Panel was committed to reading at least 50% of the items cited (RAE 5/99 page 244). In fact, of the 845 items submitted, 98% were read, mainly by the Panel or the Phonetics Sub-panel, backed up by other panels and advisors. A proportion of the items (25%) was read by two or more people.

The overall assessment was primarily based on the judgement of the quality of the cited publications and other works. The evidence of Research Students and Research Studentships (RA3), the External Research Income (RA4) and the Textual Commentary (RA5 and RA6), including individual staff circumstances, were also taken into account.

Each institution was considered at three separate meetings or more (the Panel met for six days during the summer and autumn of 2001). Decisions were taken collectively by the Panel (excluding, of course, any member with a material interest in a particular institution).

When provisional gradings had been made, submissions which were likely to receive the highest grades were referred to the International Panel for their advice. This Panel, selected for their broad view of the field, comprised: Professor Wolfgang Klein, Professor Bernard Comrie, Professor Luigi Rizzi, Professor Merrill Swain, Professor Frederick Newmeyer and Professor Mark Aronoff. This advice was taken into account at the final meeting of the Panel.

5. Cross-referrals

As already noted, the Panel referred items to other panels both when requested by the institution and when a second opinion was considered necessary. The Panel also received items cross referred in from the following Panels: 11, Other Studies and Professions Allied to Medicine; 25, Computer Science; 42, Sociology; 47, Asian Studies; 48, European Studies; 50, English Language and Literature; 57, Classics, Ancient History, Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies; 62, Philosophy. The items read for other Panels totalled 271.

6. A comparison of the outcomes of the 1996 and 2001 exercises

<i>Distribution of grades</i>			
1996 (27 institutions submitted to the Linguistics Panel)		2001 (24 institutions submitted to the Linguistics Panel)	
Grade	Number in grade	Grade	Number in grade
5*	None	5*	4
5	6	5	8
4	6	4	1
3a	6	3a	7
3b	5	3b	3
2	3	2	1
1	1	1	0
Average grade (on 7 point scale)	4.15		5.00
Median grade	3a		4

Seven institutions which submitted to the Linguistics Panel in 1996 did not do so in 2001: University of Brighton, De Montfort University, University of East London, College of Ripon and York St John, University of Sheffield, University of Southampton and Thames Valley University.

Four institutions submitted in 2001 which had not done so in 1996: University of Greenwich, University of Leeds, University of Ulster and University of Wolverhampton.

7. Comments

The Panel is aware that a substantial amount of research in linguistics is submitted to other Panels. This is natural, given the inter-disciplinary nature of the subject. This must be borne in mind when we view the field as a whole.

The Panel found examples of outstanding work in different parts of the field, a healthy diversity of approaches, promising new collaborations, and welcome contributions to the research infrastructure. Excellent work is by no means restricted to the highest rated submissions: there is fine work going on in some of the overall less highly rated submissions. Talent is widely distributed, with almost all institutions returning some work of international excellence. There is very promising work by newer researchers. Some submissions showed considerable variability, including very good and rather weak work. There are excellent PhD programmes, with postgraduate research students well integrated into the research of the department, and encouraging instances of institutional support (in the shape of scholarships). Following the British Academy *Review of Graduate Studies in the Humanities and Social Sciences* (2001) we strongly endorse the call for increased central support for postgraduates to allow more candidates to take advantage of the excellent programmes available. Some institutions attract research project funding from an impressive range of sources.

In the view of the Panel members who were also on the Panel in the 1996 exercise, there has been a substantial rise in the standard of submissions. To a limited extent this results from institutions being more selective in their submissions. The main improvement is in the quality of the best submissions, which had substantial proportions of work recognised internationally as outstanding.

8. Feedback

The Panel and HEFCE welcome feedback from the Linguistics community both on the RAE in general and on the role of the Linguistics Panel in particular. Comments on the exercise in general should be sent to the RAE Manager, Dr. John Rogers at HEFCE. Points specific to the Linguistics Panel should be sent to the Chair (g.corbett@surrey.ac.uk).

Greville G. Corbett, on behalf of the Linguistics Panel