

Ofqual,
Spring Place,
Herald Avenue,
Coventry,
CV5 6UB

School of Humanities,
Keele University,
Keele,
Staffs ST55BG

3/04/2015

Dear Chief Regulator,

I write as Chair of University English to express our profound consternation that the new AL specification in Creating Writing is under review, and thus at risk of withdrawal. University English is the main professional organization for English lecturers in universities across the UK. Our aim is to promote the study of English in all of its aspects – literature, language and creative writing – and to further the development of both teaching and research in the field. We are funded by subscription from departments, and we represent the breadth of provision at HE level across the UK. We are regularly consulted by funding councils, government agencies and other bodies: we played a full role, for example, in the recent QAA revision of the National Benchmark Statement for English.

At HE level, one of the most notable features of English provision across the nation has been the enormous rise in the popularity of Creative Writing degrees in recent years, both at under- and at post-graduate levels. There are over 140 providers of such degrees at HE level; over 500 such degree programmes; and according to HESA, over 4,000 students studying the subject at degree level (there are many more studying elective modules as part of their programmes in other degrees). In my own institution, degrees in Creative Writing have been introduced at all levels, from undergraduate to PhD, and have proved not only hugely popular, but hugely productive of excellent work: winners of our Poetry prize, for example (which is endowed by the Poet Laureate,) have gone on to publish their work, as have those pursuing phds subsequent to studying the subject at lower levels. The degrees have brought with them a collateral benefit of nurturing a vibrant writing culture beyond the confines of academic study: poetry and fiction readings regularly attract full houses of undergraduates, postgraduates, staff and the general public; the sense of community – of peer-support and of peer-review – among our creative writing students can only be envied by those teaching in other disciplines. I know that this phenomenon is repeated widely across institutions across the country.

Ofqual does not yet 'have confidence that content can be developed' that will meet its principles. But the figures I have already mentioned, detailing demand at HE level, speak

to the fact that demand at secondary level is only likely to increase. Consistency with the primary purpose of AL can be ascertained by descriptors for the subject in the English National Benchmark Statement, which also clearly details the distinctiveness of Creative Writing from the other two, more traditional, poles of English degrees (Language and Literature). Indeed, while Creative Writing is one of three central foci in the new English Benchmark Statement, it is also distinct enough to need a new Benchmark Statement of its own, a claim with which QAA agrees; similarly, that assessment for it is valid, that it differentiates quality work from that which is not so strong, and that it stretches students, training and encouraging them to produce work of which they can be justly proud – all of these things are amply evidenced in the revised Benchmark Statement, which, I would point out, benefited substantially from the advice and guidance of an Employer focus group.

We welcome the invitation to exam boards in your March 2015 document to submit additional evidence to support their proposals for the Creative Writing ALs. I have not myself seen the proposed content thus far submitted to you, and thus cannot speak for that. But that the subject is so robust at HE level makes it clear that the development of content of similar quality is eminently possible at A Level.

I conclude with one other observation. Some years ago, Media Studies was regularly derided in the press and elsewhere as a ‘mickey mouse’ subject lacking rigour, value, or the capacity to contribute to the wider economy. Now, sometimes grudgingly, those voices are falling silent, and it is increasingly recognized that we need to prepare our young people for contributions to a working life in a media age, for which Media Studies can be very valuable. The ability to write creatively, imaginatively, lucidly and persuasively is just as important. Creative Writing, at HE level, is an increasingly important player in a suite of Humanities disciplines which train our young people in the arts of communication and persuasion. We urge you not to do anything to jeopardize the health of this relatively new, but also very valuable, discipline, but instead to ensure that it is nurtured and encouraged through the provision of demanding A Level routes into the subject.

Thank you for your attention. Please do contact me if I can be of any further assistance in this matter.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Susan Bruce', with a horizontal line underneath the name.

Professor Susan Bruce