

## Pharaoh's Dream

By the time most of you read this report the submissions for REF 2014 will be more or less complete.

It has been a bruising and exhausting process for many departments. The business of gathering information, producing draft after draft of textual passages, and endless meetings with university managers and research officers consumes huge amounts of time. This round we have had the added fun of dealing with the impact agenda. Anecdotal evidence suggest that this time around much more energy (and money) has gone into commissioning external assessments of work that might be submitted. For many there have also been the anxieties of waiting to see which collected works make it out by the deadline. For some the awfulness of being excluded as universities become more concerned to submit only those researchers they think will do best in this round, or just want to keep numbers down to avoid the need for another impact case-study. And this round, as we know, it is hardly for money at all but for reputation, since there will be little research money to be distributed on the basis of the results. The reputation that really matters, of course, is local not national. The panels will produce something like a ranking of departments in each discipline. But what will determine the future of each department is how it measures up to those in other disciplines in its own institution, and increasingly how it does in the National Student Survey.

Still, for the moment things will quieten down. For a year the only people seriously engaged by the REF will be the panelists. And we have seven years until the next one, promised for 2020.

Odd as it might seem, we have lived through nearly seven years of plenty. Our discipline is in good shape. More or less the same number of classical departments will be submitted to REF 2014 as went to RAE 2008. There have been minor adjustments in the list, some from reorganizations as in Wales, a few losses – we regret that Queen Mary has finally said farewell to Classics – but some gains too, and we rejoice in the spectacular success of Roehampton. Outside Classics departments it is clear that many ancient things are still being taught and learned. Classical archaeology flourishes again in Sheffield and Southampton, there is a Professor of Humanity in Aberdeen, courses in ancient history are being taught in Leeds Trinity University and Manchester Metropolitan University, and ancient philosophy in UEA. CUCD must and will find a way to connect better to this wider classical community. As for research the REF panel will give us some sort of health check, but any subscriber to the CLASSICISTS list knows the huge volume of activity going on. The record of major research grants won by classicists - especially from AHRC, ERC and Leverhulme - is impressive.

What about the next seven years? The state of the public finances means we should at least prepare for a few lean years. Austerity will come from several directions, from the impact of student fees south of the border, from successive spending reviews putting pressure on funding councils and research councils alike, and from the general threats posed by rising levels of debt and casualization. Fortunately we have stored up some provisions in the granaries. Most important are the early career researchers who have refilled our departments as the baby-

boomers retired. Competition for those posts was tough, but that means we have excellent new colleagues. It is in the enlightened self-interest of senior academics to do all they can to help the new recruits develop their teaching and research. We have many other assets too. Public interest in our subject is wonderfully high. We have good reason to thank those who have kept Classics in the media, both academics like Mary Beard, Paul Cartledge and Michael Scott and also our erudite and passionate friends outside the academy like Charlotte Higgins, Tom Holland and Peter Stothard. UCAS figures for the last seven years show applications holding up very well. Recent attempts to close classics departments have been resisted with great success, notably by Royal Holloway.

All the same, at any one time there seems to be always at least one department under pressure from its own university and in recent years I estimate four or five have faced the threat of involuntary redundancies or closure. There have been no complete closures yet, but some colleagues have left the profession or left it earlier than they wished, and many have been subjected to long and demoralizing reviews and uncertainty. This is perhaps the moment to record our gratitude to my predecessor as CUCD chair, Robin Osborne, for the energy with which he supported departments under threat.

What we have learned from these experiences seems to me to be the following: that university managers don't always get their sums right, and their calculations about finances or student numbers are always worth checking; that departments that hang together stand a better chance than those that are divided; that having good relations with cognate disciplines can make all the difference; that the support of our students helps enormously; and that in the end, going public may be the only effective protest. University managers have learned some of this too. The attempt by Birmingham to gag staff whose jobs were under threat was shameful, and the attempt by Royal Holloway managers to stop their students talking about the threat to Classics on Facebook was laughable. Most of all we know we must not suffer in silence.

At present, it is difficult to predict how many Classics departments will make submissions to REF 2020. But let us be optimistic, and let us hope that there will be a couple more Roehampton to celebrate, and even perhaps that economic recovery will mean there will some money to distribute at the end of it all. We can be sure, I think, that classical subjects will continue to be taught widely, perhaps even more widely, in UK universities. There is no doubt that by 2020 the classical landscape will look different. Learned societies, print journals and single honours classics degrees may all figure less than they do at present. But the grain we have stored up during our years of plenty mean we ought to be able to keep teaching and keep researching and keep communicating about Classics well beyond then. Let us look forward to the end of austerity, and a new classical Golden Age!

Greg Woolf, University of St Andrews