

53rd Meeting of the Council of Management – 22nd May 2009

Annual Report by Professor John Akker, Executive Secretary - Academic Year 2008/2009

Overview

1. Our work for this period has concentrated upon three main segments. The first has been the very considerable demand for our services. Our President stated last year that “it was not simply raining now, but pouring”. If anything, in the last twelve months, the ‘weather’ has worsened significantly. As detailed elsewhere help is being given to an ever increasing number of refugee academics but ‘help’ now means more than the provision of grants as indicated here and in the reports of my colleagues.

2. The second has been sustaining our work in these difficult economic times. Although the first part of the period was comparatively calm that second part has been very difficult. Great emphasis has been placed upon the raising of funds and how we can make our finite resources go further. In this we have had some success with new income being obtained and costs reduced but more needs to be done and it is not my style to sit on what we have already achieved.

3. The third is demonstrating to the outside world (and it is an audience that is increasingly outside the UK) what we do and why we should be supported. The need for us to champion the cause of the academic refugee is ever present and we have sought to undertake this wherever needed. The 75th Anniversary has been an outstanding success judged by any measure. Our book the ‘The Refugee and the Fortress’ by Jeremy Seabrook has been very well received and has captured major attention. It is now to be reprinted. The Anniversary Conference held over three days last December was also an outstanding success. Both have enabled us to have a major programme to build upon the publicity obtained and to sustain and develop our work. We now have a programme of events going well into 2009 and beyond and we engaging key groups and interests in a most stimulating and interesting way. These include students, potential funders, NGO’s and foreign governments

Current work and activities

4. The nature of our activities is increasingly complex and difficult. Last year I reported that we are supporting the highest number of refugee or at risk academics since the 1930s. That was in excess of 200. This has been added to in the current year though the exact number is difficult to quantify. This is because not all those that receive help obtain funds from us and we operate

a considerable information and advice service where much of the information is available on our website and links with others. A major development this year has been a new service provided by us that is supported by a 50% contribution by the European Refugee Fund(ERF). This is the education training and employment activity that provides direct guidance to obtaining employment. Some of those we might have assisted with a grant for study or bench fees may not now need to do so because of this. This service deals with an aspect that has long concerned us that of gaining employment where an academic post is not a possible option. A detailed report on the new service is given in the Council papers and will be reported upon at the meeting.

5. As has been stated in previous years there is increasing difficulty for some academic refugees to obtain entry to the UK. Those from Iraq in particular are subject to forced removals and we have had difficulty in obtaining entrance to the UK where the applicant has not sought refugee status i.e. awarded a Fellowship on the Iraq Programme.

6. The Iraq Programme has been an important feature of our work during the period. Since 2005 when Council approved the development of a scheme to help Iraqi refugee academics there has been much emphasis on developing activities to retain and enhance their skills and knowledge. This is so that they are able to continue to work in the region or to return to Iraq when they are able. The work has received support from the Sigrid Rausing Trust during the last year and I am very pleased to be able to report to Council that a grant has been received from the Open Society Institute (OSI) . This is for a period of two years though it is hoped that this will be extended. This will enable an office to be open in Jordan and much more locally focused activity to take place.

7. It is very pleasing that we have been chosen as the Charity of Year by the Times Higher Education (previously the THES). This recognition will be marked at their Awards Ceremony to be held in October when universities and others will be chosen for their excellence for research and teaching. This is a very significant achievement and recognises the work undertaken by us.

8. Our book was also long listed for the 2009 George Orwell Prize making their long for political writing. We have been also been in discussions with Westminster Abbey about a campaign to assist asylum seekers obtain entry to universities. This is so that they may obtain entry at the home level of fees. Many asylum seekers are still waiting for decisions on applications made for refugee status having been here for many years. The Archbishop of Canterbury may also be undertaking a lecture for us in 2010.

Strategic Direction 1: Grant and Information & Advice Programme

9. The Grant Programme continues to be at the centre of our work. 53 grantees were supported during the year. The figures show a slight reduction compared with the previous year in terms of grants awarded but there has been increased emphasis on other kinds of support not requiring a grant to be made. The details are given in the paper to Council (paper 4).

10. As ever, the report shows that some of the sums awarded were very small. The list is most impressive in that it indicated that only a relative small sum can make a telling difference to changing the life of an academic refugee. The Allocations Committee have had some extremely difficult decisions to make because the applications made represent considerably more than the expenditure available. Furthermore because of the pressure upon overall funds there has been a need to give special consideration for applications where funding is over many years. The budget for the Grant Programme has been maintained as has been indicated in the financial data before Council. A significant loss will occur after 2010 to the income for the Grant Programme. Arcadia has supported us for the last four years but has given notice because of the financial situation and a change of focus that their grant will come to an end next year. The grant is for £100k pa. This is very disappointing news for us and we are urgently seeking other funders to make up for this loss. I am most grateful to the Chair of the Allocations Committee, Professor Alan McCarthy, for his very considerable contribution to the Grants Programme.

11. The number of 'hits' for our website for March was 46,536 which indicates a considerable interest. This not only related to the events and Iraq but also information about our grant programme and employment work.

Strategic Direction 2: Iraq Programme as determined by Council in 2006, 2007 and 2008

12. The Emergency Appeal Fund for Iraqi Academics has been deployed in a number of ways. Regrettably the Hardship Committee has not met owing to the funds already being spent in the previous year. Regarding the fellowship programme, we are most grateful to the universities that have supported this work. Without their commitment this would have been impossible. We have provided legal assistance to gain entry in a number of cases, since without this the scheme would not have much impact. We have given attention to seeing how we could obtain a quicker resolution by the Government in deciding entry into the UK. For the reason that cases do take some time to resolve we have needed to allocate sums for future expenditure, although we have received the funding in the interim.

13. In addition, finance has been allocated towards related policy and other work. On the authorisation of the F&GPC exploratory work has continued to establish what help might be made available in the region, in Syria, Jordan and Egypt.

We have held meetings of academics in both Syria and Jordan. Extensive discussions have been held with UNHCR, UNESCO, Government Ministers, universities as well as other representatives drawn from the local Iraqi community. We have also had discussions with the British Council and the FCO both in region and the UK.

14. We attended the UNESCO Conference on Higher Education and Iraq in late October. We were most grateful that Professor Michael Worton and Mrs Anne Lonsdale participated in this meeting. Mr David Ure has taken a lead role for the F&GPC for the programme and I am also indebted to him for his assistance and invaluable advice.

15. Currently, we are establishing a facility in Jordan to assist Iraqi academics in remaining active within academia and to facilitate exchange and collaboration with the wider academic world. The aim is also to support academics in Syria and Egypt as well as Jordan. We continue to work with the Scholars Rescue Fund (SRF) and the Scholars at Risk Network (SAR).

Strategic Direction 3: Development and the 75th Anniversary Programme as determined by Council at the AGM June 2008

16. We have created during the year a development programme to coordinate our outreach activities. This is of very great potential and importance to us. This is will have overall responsibility for fundraising, public relations and events although these activities are so wide that each staff member will have their responsibilities within this. Events that have been carried out during the year include: a lecture and reception at the Royal Society on immigration and refugees; a cycle event to raise funds and promote CARA between the University of Cambridge and UCL; and a meeting at SOAS involving grantees and the Minister for Higher Education, Innovation and Skills. Further events this year include one at the Oxford Union, a Gresham Lecture in the City of London, talks and discussions at Oxford Colleges; and five other events are being discussed jointly with the Department of Innovation, Universities and Skills (DUIS).

17. In addition our hosted and related organisation the Network for Education and Academic Rights (NEAR) has undertaken workshops in five regions in the world including East Africa, West Africa and the Middle East. I took part in two of these and this has added considerably to our knowledge and networks to support our activities. I have been invited to attend the World Conference on Higher Education organised by UNESCO in July and also address this meeting and UNESCO's main committee that deals with academic freedom and we will be raising with them the need for UNESCO to have special attention to academic refugees.

Strategic Direction 4: development of the CARA/SAR UK Universities Network, reaffirmed by the AGM in 2007 and 2008

18. The CARA/SAR UK Universities Network continues to provide invaluable assistance to us and there have been some very interesting developments. A meeting of the Network was held in February at which over 25 representatives attended. The network has encouraged individual universities to assist both those who are on our UK and Iraq programmes and have given financial and other practical assistance. Warwick University and UCL have created fellowships for academic refugees. There is in the final stages of preparation a handbook for use by the Network and others relating to good practice for assisting refugee academics. It is expected that the current membership of 44 universities will be significantly added to in the next period.

Strategic Direction 5: deployment of financial and human resources, determined by Council at the 2007 and 2008 AGM

19. As determined by Council there has been a reduction in our asset base to fund the increased demand for our activities. This has been determined at the last two meetings.

20. The Hon. Treasurer will provide details to Council about the financial situation following the considerable activity to improve our financial position. Very sustained efforts has been to raise funding. Apart from the Open Society Institute (OSI) and the Sigrid Rausing Trust (that has also requested an application for a further three years) other awards have been received. In addition, further applications are still outstanding.

22. We are indebted to London South Bank University for providing us with such a substantial reduction on the office and support costs. A three year agreement was entered into in November 2008. We are particularly indebted to the CARA Vice-Chair, Professor Deian Hopkin.

21. We have also established a President's Committee that met in April. The Committee includes the President of the Royal Society; Lord Krebs, Master of Jesus College, Oxford, Sir Joseph Hotung, Dr Ralph Kohn, and the Officers. The purpose has been to assist with contacts and ideas about fundraising. As a result of this, additional funds have already been obtained and are reflected in the financial data. The consequence of This is that the financial situation is far better than expected although we have the matter under constant review. The sums expended by us on core costs are a significant item and we are doing all we can to obtain funding that is not related specifically to programme costs.

23. Council is very fortunate to have a very professional and dedicated staff. They have obtained through their representations “in kind” support equivalent in monetary terms to £240k, through the waiving of course and bench fees etc.

24. We also wish to encourage donations through payroll giving, which will have the virtue of providing regular repeated payments and, based upon the experience of other charities, can generate significant sums. Approaches have been made to some of our Network Universities. There is in excess of one hundred and fifty thousand university staff that could be targeted in the UK universities. There is much to do and we are piloting an scheme in two universities to see what are the best possible approach could be to raise funds in this way.

Other matters

25. We have continued to have a close working relationship with the Scholars Rescue Fund (SRF) and Scholars at Risk (SAR) both based in the USA. They are very important organisations and represent an ever increasing worldwide interest in protecting refugee academics, although each operates in a different ways from us.

26. Due to our increased turnover and changes brought about by the recent Charities Act various changes have occurred in the management of the Charity. We provide our Accounts earlier and due to our increased size we also supply further details. Risk management continues to be a matter delegated to the F&GPC.

27. I wish to thank Sir John Ashworth, Professor Sir Robert Boyd, Mrs Anne Lonsdale, Mr Mark Wellby and our Committees for the very great help given to me during the year. This has been very considerable indeed. They have made the activities reported here possible through their work and considerable support. I also wish to acknowledge the debt I owe to CARA staff, interns and volunteers. We have had many contributions from very talented and energetic individuals and this I believe has contributed greatly to our cause.

John Akker
Executive Secretary
May 2009