

# Ordinary General Meeting 11/12 November 2006

## Officer Reports

### Project Officers

Rhys Kearney

The project is looking at creating 'best practice' guidelines for postgraduate representation in higher educational institutions. The NPC has produced a remarkably large amount of literature regarding postgraduates and their experiences and many recommendations have been made. Once reviewed, a summary document outlining key measures will be produced with the intention of creating a clear framework from which sound postgraduate provisions can be based.

Armineh Soorenian

Based on my personal experience of being a disabled international student in British HE and facing inequalities, I have a desire to improve this group's educational life. In preparing documents for my PhD research on this topic, there was a clear lack of data about disabled international students studying in the UK. Therefore, studying the area and campaigning for making disabled international students' educational/support conditions better appears to be timely and original.

### Background

On the national level, the data available from the Higher Education Statistical Agency (HESA) and Skill: the national bureau of students with disabilities, shows that the number of disabled domestic students has been on the increase over the last four years. In the academic year 2000/01, for example, the number of disabled domestic students was 82280, whereas in the year 2003/04, this number increased to 115595. This increase can be partly attributed to Part4 of the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) in the name of Special Educational Needs Act (SENDA), which came into force in 2001, removing the previous exemption of education from the DDA (1995).

The inclusive policies adopted by the Labour government to accommodate diversity within the student population, including untraditional and under-represented groups in HE, may also have contributed to the increase of disabled domestic students' numbers (Brown & Simpson:2004; Riddell et al:2005). It can also be argued that the possibility of accessing different funds such as Disability Support Allowance (DSA), Access Funds, Discretionary Awards and Social Security Benefits to help with impairment related costs has made the transition of disabled domestic students from Further Education (FE) to mainstream HE somewhat smoother.

All these facts suggest a positive move towards the social interpretation of disability in education. The social model is a concerted shift away from an emphasis on individual impairments as the cause of disability, to the way in which physical/cultural/social environments exclude or disadvantage disabled people (Barnes:2001). In an educational context, this view recognises, various educational/environmental/social barriers obstructing disabled students' progress rather than seeing individual students' impairments as the "problem" (Riddell et al:2005). Therefore, it advocates for the changes in society/educational systems to accommodate all students rather than holding individual disabled students responsible for their failure to access education.

However, ample research has criticised HE, the support it offers to disabled students and the relevant funding bodies. According to these studies, there are certain barriers to disabled domestic students' access into HE including physical access, curriculum delivery and assessment procedures but very little is written about disabled international students' barriers.

Despite the clear lack of research in this area, since 2000/01 disabled international students' numbers have been on the increase, although certainly not to the extent of disabled domestic students. The figures provided by HESA show that in the year 2000/01, the number of the former group was 3970, whereas this number has increased to 5490 in the year 2003/04. While the increase appears to be proportionally the same as that of

disabled domestic students (40.5% increase in disabled domestic students, and 38.2% in disabled international students), there remains a large difference in the overall quantities of the two populations.

Yet, disabled international students' proportion is larger compared to the increase of non-disabled international students in the last four years. In 2000/01, for example, there were 216145 non-disabled international students. By 2003/04, this had increased to 286425, which shows a 32.5% increase.

This amount of growth once again highlights the necessity of research and campaign into disabled international students' experiences. In the literature studied thus far, disabled international students' needs are often associated with Skill and the Council for International Education (UKCOSA). Yet, neither of these organizations appears to be specifically concerned with the provision for this group. This indicates a lack of an organization being solely responsible for disabled international students' affairs, including representation, advisory service, policy-making and campaigning.

In addition to the cultural/linguistic barriers experienced by most non-disabled international students, the disabled international students may face unique impairment related barriers. For example, the facts prepared by UKCOSA and Skill (<http://www.ukcosa.org.uk/pages/disabilityfaqs.doc>) emphasise that there are no available specific grants for disabled international students to meet their impairment related costs. They are only allowed to remain in the UK with the condition that they make no recourse to public funds including such welfare benefits as DSA, and therefore they have to rely on the discretion of their university.

Consequently disabled international students may feel their presence and difficulties are 'irrelevant' or 'added on as an optional extra'. Contrary to Skill's statement, they may feel rejected from both disabled domestic students' and non-disabled international students' groups, feeling marginalized and discriminated against.

'Disabled students come under the Act [SENDA] no matter what their status: part-time, overseas, evening class, postgraduate, undergraduate, distance learning, etc.' (DEMOS:2003 <http://jarmin.com/demos/course/send/index.html>).

Through the following questions, I aim to explore different aspects of disabled international students' experiences in British HE. Their additional difficulties to the barriers pointed out above will be identified and examined. The findings are hoped to suggest ways that these barriers can be removed.

### Questions

Q1 "What is known at present about disabled international students' status in British HE and the kind of services they receive?"

Q2 "What are disabled international participants' opinions and experiences on the services they receive concerning their impairment-related difficulties?"

Q3 "What are disabled international participants' opinions and experiences on encountering difficulties in HE?"

Q4 "What are disabled international participants' opinions and experiences with regard to the levels of inclusion they experience in their respective universities?"

### Data Collection Strategy

This section will address the mixed qualitative data collection strategies through which the questions above will be answered.

The location of universities for this study is selected on snowball/convenience sampling procedures. Consequently, the universities selected are a mixture of those in the Yorkshire area and those which responded favourably to my initial research request.

The data generating strategies will include a review of relevant literature and previous research to identify key themes. A content analysis of the equal opportunities and the literature on service provision in all selected universities will be considered. This will refine the themes found in the literature review and clarify topics for discussion in the focus groups. During the time of content analysis, the student/staff samples in each university will be determined.

One focus group with the student group in each university will be conducted. The focus group will act as a sample recruiting strategy for semi-structured interviews. It will refine and validate topics for the semi-structured interviews.

Based on the themes discussed in the focus groups, a semi-structured interview with five student participants in each university is planned. Two representatives from each university as well as two persons with high status from two national educational bodies such as Skill, Higher Education Funding Council England (HEFCE) and Council for International Students (CIS) will also be interviewed. Finally, the content of all transcripts will be thematically analysed and interpreted. These findings are hoped to not only provide insight into disabled international students' experiences but also offer ways of removing the barriers they face, including lack of funding for impairment related costs. Following these recommendations, we can campaign for availability of funds to assist disabled international students with their support costs, so they can partake in HE as their non-disabled counterparts. In addition, following from my links with Skill, in next year's AGM, I would like us to invite a speaker from this organization, to talk about disabled international students' difficulties in British HE, thus promoting this minority group's representation.

Daniel Snowdon

### Apologies

I have to send my apologies for not being able to attend the NPC OGM. This is due to a pre-planned family event on the Saturday night. I will make my way to York on Sunday if this is possible.

### Update on what I have done so far

I have been organising talks and seminars with regard to supervision that took place on Wednesday 1<sup>st</sup> of November.

Attended the OIA workshops in Reading that had a strong focus on Postgraduate issues.

Formulated the Postgraduate Students' Charter at ULU.

Launched the Postgraduate Advice Service at ULU. This has been used by many students already and the advice/representation of postgrads.

### My Proposal

For my project I want to raise awareness on the issues that arise through supervision. This would include the following:

- Lobbying Universities (who do not currently enforce the QAA recommendations for supervision) to comply.
- Highlight the disparities of the levels of supervision that PhD students experience by formulating an online questionnaire about the student experience regarding supervision. This would be put on the NPC website with links from ULU and other students' unions websites.
- To finally write a detailed report of recommendations to be submitted to the QAA and the Department for Education and Skills outlining the problems students face with supervision.
- I will propose at the NPC Conference that the NPC adopt this as an ongoing piece of work so that the next stage can be fulfilled — to ensure that they take our recommendations seriously.

Although my absence at the OGM cannot be avoided, if this is rejected may I request that my project is amended but without destroying the methods and intentions of each of my points.

## Alex Higgins

The Postgraduate Association of the University of Sussex (PGA) — the representative association of the Students' Union representing all students registered for postgraduate qualifications at the University — decided at its meeting on 18 October 2006 to highlight financial problems affecting research students and campaign, alongside the National Postgraduate Committee (NPC), against the exclusion of students from research degree study due to crippling undergraduate and masters-level student debt and insufficient research student funding at PhD level.

➤ Problem areas include:

It is exceptionally difficult for a research student (particularly in the social sciences and humanities) to receive a bursary or scholarship for a project that is interdisciplinary and multi-layered as research student funding is still organised along disciplinary lines. Equally, a student proposing a project that is daring and unconventional and challenges traditional paradigms will rarely get funded as such a project withstands easy assessment.

At the same time, with top-up fees and student debt levels on the increase, fewer and fewer students will be able to fund themselves for the duration of their research degrees.

If research students get to work as associate tutors they either complain that they do not get enough teaching hours to make a living, or that teaching duties are so heavy that they won't be able to finish their DPhils within reasonable time.

Many promising research students are forced to work jobs that have nothing to do with their research and waste the years of their lives in which they could be most productive.

*New ways of funding research degree study must therefore be identified and tried as a matter of urgency across the UK higher education sector and at each particular institution.*

As such research students often work in interdisciplinary fields for which there is little institutional funding available there is a growing diaspora and divide permeating university education.

Students seeking and exploring alternative sources of funding for research degree study fulfil an important role in highlighting shortcomings in research student funding in the UK and the danger that genuinely original research will increasingly be possible only outside the formal structures of a university.

➤ Guiding idea of this stage of the project:

*This project is based on the premise that the prevailing system of funding for research degree study does not adequately cater for (even marginalises) those students who wish to pursue a more unconventional or interdisciplinary line of research. At the same time in order to uncover the dynamics of this situation it will be necessary to gather information concerning the financial situation of students and related trends in "conceptual use".*

1. As part of an investigation into "general changes" in postgraduate education the project will:

*a) increase our understanding of the way in which the financial position of students shapes the world that they believe they live in, through an innovative poll/survey and/or collation of information.*

For example those students who are English have made their way through the debt structures of education in the UK as undergraduates, and having become postgraduates will have a rather different conception of the world that they live in than an international student just coming to the UK for a postgraduate course.

At the same time it is necessary to find out about the finance-education-background of international students as they have a history that may be relevant before they arrive in the UK

*b) try to compare the results of such a survey or poll above with the beliefs and conceptual usage of a university administration or the senior management. Though it may be difficult to gather such information, an added degree of legitimacy will be provided should the NPC agree to this project.*

As merely an example of how this might work if b) reveals that most of those who are running a university believe in the state and not in globalisation beyond enlarged financial markets but most of those students at the university believe that globalisation is a political question and the state doesn't exist there might be a mismatch between the world student's believe in and the one the university does. This may be a very unlikely finding but it acts as an example.

It is worth asking if the management of the university should or could reflect the different thoughts of those students as to what the world is. Some would suggest that the current management of universities in the UK seems closer to oligarchy than any democratic principle. I think this would be an interesting area to at least enquire into.

Interviews with university managers could be completed in order to gauge the questions raised above.

➤ Backbone concerns of the project:

Just last week in the Times Higher Education Supplement it was reported that recent research shows a feeling that "Higher education is 'selling its soul' as managerialism, regulation and the drive to get 'bums on seats' replace the wider human good of academe..." According to this research "72 per cent of academics think higher education has lost its role as the 'conscience and critic of society'. Some 85 per cent agreed that the 'humanity and excitement' have been lost, while 77 per cent said the 'joy of learning' once associated with higher education has been lost to targets and performance measures."

What my survey will enable is a gauging of how students conceptualise the world and whether these highlighted and suggested conditions by the THES survey are ones that are felt in the student population. Indeed the managerialism that is spoken off with regard to higher education in the UK may be related to the debt structures and the financial position that students currently face.

By looking at the methodology and results of the THES survey more closely it may be possible to duplicate it for this postgraduate enquiry.

- What world might people think they live in?:

Common terms that will likely arise are (these will be developed further for the survey)

e.g.

1. Globalisation - economic, political
2. State,
3. Competition State,
4. World - plurality
5. Production Techniques — Taylorism, Fordism, Post-Fordism, Just in Time, Knowledge economy
6. Post-modern conceptions
7. Realpolitik

- What kind of financial divides will the survey employ?:

e.g.

1. Number of hours paid work per week?
2. Student loan?
3. How many bank accounts?
4. How many overdrafts?
5. Any commercial loans?
6. Savings?
7. Credit cards
8. Total debt or credit?
9. Institutional or RC funding?

➤ Methodology:

Develop the methodology through my PhD research training course.

Test-run at Sussex with the possibility of "piggy backing" this project as a questionnaire/poll with:

- the University of Sussex Student Union who are in the process of developing a survey
- perhaps just with the Postgraduate Association of the University of Sussex:

The survey could be performed through the PGA mailing list asking postgraduate students questions about how they perceive higher education to have changed over the time that they have been in higher education. UK students and international students would be looked at

Other questions concerning their general world views could be asked at this stage. This would be along the lines of whether they Strongly Agree / Agree / Don't Know / Disagree / Strongly Disagree with the certain statements made about the world.

They would be given the opportunity to write some paragraphs of their own airing other matters that the survey design may not provide.

Once results of this survey/questionnaire at Sussex have been obtained in-depth interviews with people who replied to the survey could be begun.

This would be a qualitative study of postgraduate students' perception of the marketisation of higher education using my own thoughts (incorporating Hannah Arendt, Niklas Luhmann, and other social theorists) as the theoretical framework for this study.

Input is sought from the Working group on Research of Sussex PGA (meeting on 3 November)

If the project design is a success at Sussex University the survey could perhaps be taken to the national level.

Of course as a project for the NPC it might be thought best to avoid any involvement with researching undergraduates along these lines. It would though be of interest to find out the relationship between undergraduate debt and postgraduate degrees with reference to the conceptual survey so envisaged here. The survey that the NPC carried out last year can be built upon in this regard.

- The survey will allow themes relevant to the premise of the project to be developed.

e.g.

1. *Education and potential*
  - whether the current interpenetration of debt structures into the postgraduate population is a limit rather than an aide to their realisation of their potential.
  - research different educational models and the responses of postgraduates to them
2. *Education and a meaningful life*
  - empowering postgraduates to question the world they live in, the decisions that affect their lives, and their own role in the generation of the world and its decisions.
  - How much do our education structures and operations allow for the creation of a world we want rather than one that is satisfactory
3. *Changing educational structures*
  - Identifying frustration with the current educational and institutional culture
  - highlighting shortcomings in research student funding in the UK and the danger that genuinely original research will increasingly be possible only outside the formal structures of a university.
4. *Changes that may be necessary for institutional renewal*

New ways of funding research degree study to be identified and tried as a matter of urgency across the UK higher education sector and at each particular institution.

Universities should actively back research students who are trying to find alternative ways to fund their research degree study.

It may be necessary to make a distinction in this regard between MA and research students.

Chandan Singh

My report is about findings of accomodation issues among student's with the respect to their backgrounds while their studies within University.

At the moment I am trying to collect as much as data as I can through my various contacts to prepare my report.

Please feel free to contact me if you any more information

**Communications Officer - Chris Whittaker**

So far this year, I haven't been able to commit very much time to my role as communications officer. This is chiefly due to the madness of Freshers' week and the aftermath, but I have also been spending a large amount of time working with my PG

officer down in Southampton improving the representation system we have in place for postgrads, and lobbying the university to give us a PG social space.

With that in mind, I shall use this report to let you know what I am planning to do with the remainder of this autumn.

I've begun compiling this quarter's issue of PN. If I haven't already approached you for articles, then rest assured I shall be doing so at some point very soon! It's my intention to send out an e-PN as well as a paper version — this will serve two functions: firstly, it will make it more accessible to our affiliates, and allow them to forward it on to their PG communities, and also we will be able to measure the success of an e-version, and decide whether we want to move entirely to electronic — saving on printing costs for the NPC!

As far as press releases go, don't forget that I'm available to do those — I haven't received anything from anyone so far... So please pass on anything you want released to me — and I shall endeavour to communicate it.

## **General Secretary Report**

Simon Felton

### **Week Commencing 7th August 2006**

Some time was spent recovering from the conference and then preparation for delivering a session at the NUS Activities in Action training at Hertfordshire University on 9th August. This went relatively well and was able to discuss supporting postgraduate student activities and some of the outcomes of David Beans report.

Thursday 10th, met with Baroness Deech and Mike Reedy, Deputy Adjudicator from the Office of the Independent Adjudicator. They confirmed with regard to cases where the university was acting against producing letter of completion that in exceptional cases they would start investigation without this letter.

They confirmed they would be happy to attend our meetings and found that Student Unions were good in supporting complaints.

We also discussed issues that they had picked up on and that as a sector and as an organisation we could seek to improve. These include supervisors needing to be more blunt to say if work is not at required standard and also for supervisors to record meetings and progress.

### **Week Commencing 14th August 2006**

A week of ensuring payments were being sent for outstanding conference payments and preparation for NUS Action Through Advocacy Training at Chester University.

Thursday 17th delivered workshop on postgraduate issues at the NUS Action Through Advocacy training. This went really well with support from Richard Angell. There was a good mix of universities and had a useful chat with the education officer from Gloucester University SU and Anglia Ruskin University SU Education Officer about postgraduate issues.

### **Week Commencing 21st August 2006**

Wednesday 23rd went to see the Postgraduate Officer at Birkbeck College. He was starting from scratch and was looking for ideas and support. We discussed the representational structure and ways to support postgraduates who face difficulties raising issues within the university.

After meeting the postgraduate officer I was able to meet Dan Snowdon, ULU VP and discuss his project and the ULU Postgraduate Charter.

Friday 23rd met with President of BUGS in morning to discuss reshuffle in Guild and office being moved into new postgraduate space. The postgraduate space is really exciting and follows the example of Cardiff amongst others in giving postgraduates a space within the union.

In afternoon of 23rd attended the first Aldwych meeting of the year following the handover in Edinburgh. This was an interesting meeting in that there was a substantial debate on observers being able to receive Aldwych emails. The group was split with those wanting observers to remain and those wanting them taken off the list and it was agreed that relevant emails would be forward to the observers with them being taken off the list.

One of the first issues discussed was Grade Inflation and with Imperial particularly seeing other universities with higher rate of 1st and 2.1s awarded.

There were also discussions on dates for meetings for the year, the National Student Survey, dealing with the press and the role of the Aldwych group. All in all, it was a meeting to thrash out some of the organisation and it appears to be continuing on the email list to the current date.

### **Week Commencing 28th August 2006**

Friday 1st September attended the NUS RAE Focus Group to discuss the NUS response to the consultation. There was a good mix of unions with UEL, Kings, Reading, Manchester and Bucks-Chiltern in attendance.

The discussion began with an outline of system and what we should aspire to in a brain storming session. The NPC existing policy was used as example and NPC was able to lead in particulars of impact upon existing students and opportunities for research.

Some of the outcomes were ideas that there should be no subsidy from teaching for research, the removal of crude boundaries between department ratings, academic freedom and the freedom to research. There was also the catch 22 of capacity building and giving potential. A recognition of bibliometrics, the impact of supervision, and access.

Saturday 2nd September went to Royal Holloway, University of London to deliver a workshop training session on postgraduates for the new Queen Mary Student Union executive committee. This was useful as there are particulars related to medical students and local attendance that make Queen Mary different from other universities.

### **Week Commencing 4th September 2006**

Monday 4th September met with Bill Rammell with Tim Roll-Pickering and Richard Angell

from NUS block of 12. We had prepared a paper and supporting evidence for Bill Rammell on the issue of postgraduate funding and council tax exemption for writing up students. While he understood the desire for postgraduate funding and a postgraduate loan there was simply no money in the department for such funding. Mr Rammell was however interested in the issue of Council Tax for Writing up Students and promised to investigate when we provided him with supporting evidence - he clarified that this should be relatively easy to sort. He would also investigate the decline in domicile students at postgraduate level which I noted.

Thursday 7th I attended the UKGRAD Annual Conference where I was able to meet Raffaella (President of Eurodoc). I will send a separate report as there was a lot discussed. The conference noted the move to 2007 London conference and defining what the PhD looks like.

It was noted the benefit to society economically and socially of research and the 30,000 researchers funded directly or indirectly by research councils.

There were presentations on responding to the challenge from European perspectives of Germany and Finland, Implications for UK PhD programmes, recruiting trends, what business wants in PhDs, a Regional Development Agency perspective.

There were also a variety of workshops and I attended the one on the Bologna process and update on where we are together with a workshop looking at the impact of increased stipends on research attractiveness.

In the evening I attended the NUS Campaigns Launch with Janet Bohrer from QAA. We met with various members of the NUS executive and I was able to discuss highlighting the parties views on education prior to the Scottish elections next year.

Sat9th / Sunday 10th - MSC training at Keele university. This was the introduction to the NPC and a discussion of the forthcoming year. It went really well and we played two games to learn more about ourselves together with team-role analysis to see what skills we had as a group.

### **Week Commencing 11th September 2006**

Thursday 14th met with Assistant Director of HERO, Higher Education and Research Opportunities. Seamus discussed the move in HERO to focus on postgraduates more as it had been ignored within their remit. They would create a postgraduate page leading to separate signposting for PG Research and Taught. The NPC would work with HERO to focus the content and help write content to attract postgraduates and highlight issues they should consider in choosing where to study or research

### **Week Commencing 18th September 2006**

Tuesday 19th — attended the HEA Survey of Taught Masters Programmes advisory group. The purpose of the meeting was to discuss the progress of the project and clarification of the data set and agreement on target sample.

The survey will be based on NSS but tailored to Taught Masters programmes. The survey implementation would be around January 2007 using an e-survey format. There would also be 12/15 focus groups with students.

The sample for the survey would include a variety of institutions spreading the devolved nations and variety of masters programmes (i.e. Russell, 94, conservatoire).

To encourage institutions to participate in test there would be a letter from the HEA to the institutions appropriate contact (PVC, VC etc) that would be signed by NPC, UKCGE and HEA to show sector wide investment in project. There would be an incentive for student participation to gain a good response rate of a travel related prize.

The survey question development would be coordinated with the Essex Database of surveys, focus group pilot with students, and a mixture of student led question development and desk-based question development.

Following the meeting I met with Jen (Chairperson) to discuss NPC issues and resolved to move OGM from Birmingham to York through ease of accommodation.

Thursday 21st September 2006

Attended the Europe Unit meeting on the Bologna Process and Doctoral Level Qualifications. This had representatives from most organisations in the sector including QAA, UKGRAD, Research Councils, UUK. The meeting was aimed at gathering the sectors views on the Bologna process to consolidate UK position for December meeting.

Supervision — UK was currently ahead in Europe but there was a danger of being complacent. UK much more coordinated than rest of Europe. Emphasis on panel supervision and not focussing on one person.

Assessment — Public viva in other systems but the student unlikely to fail as already passed effectively in earlier stage.

Credit — Italy and Scandinavian countries have a credit based PhD. There were concerns over joint degrees and mobility and that credit may be used as a lever. There would also be a huge variation internally in universities.

Diploma supplement available for PhD, recognition of Roberts Training.

Generic Skills — The UK always been advanced. Good links with Eurodoc. Nobody however has defined generic or transferable. There are links here to mobility and credit.

Career Development Skills. Link to taught course aspects. Question of programme of study or generic skills as part of process of doing PhD or gaining skills through reflective practice.

ESRC accredited side training.

Status of Doctoral Candidates — Iain Cameron noted the NPC position on this and also Eurodoc and gave a very succinct response that suggests package available to students and issues of employment legislation make it good to maintain Doctoral status as student.

The discussion in the European charter could be reconciled in that we ensure doctoral students are treated as professionals without needing to change their status to employees. The consumer driven approach to PhDs classed them as students and they have benefits plus personal development. Consumer rights were being used to tackle supervision.

It was agreed that the UK need not be so defensive of its position as Doctoral candidates as students. If Europe moved to employee with payment that would not enable those without funding to do PhD. This was slowly being recognised in other countries.

Access and Duration — There was discussion on not overregulating process and recognising the diversity.

The access issue was controversial as it linked into the integrated masters that were questioned in Europe.

Europe Unit was investigating the European Landscape for Masters.

There was a question on the comparability of One year masters in Europe.

Also focus on Learning Outcome comparability.

Joint Degrees/ Mobility — Mobility within UK and also within industry / academia. Flows into UK greater due to language skills. Agreement between institutions would be necessary.

Question on title of doctorate — who owns? European doctorate set of principles.

Increasing number of students going abroad to do masters and PhD.

### **Week Commencing 25th September 2006**

Friday 29th attended the HEA Widening Participation advisory board meeting in Kingston-upon-Thames. The project fits in with other HEA projects on i) the research environment, ii) transition from UG to PG.

Project looking at three questions:

- 1) How important are the findings from undergraduate widening participation debate, such as friendships, relationships with academics and support staff and the role of the personal tutor, to first generation students at postgraduate level?
- 2) Is there a relationship between an undergraduate's exposure to an intellectual environment, whether that is via the family or institution, and their progress on to postgraduate study?
- 3) Has the Government's widening participation policy influenced students to participate at postgraduate level or do the principal barriers in attainment,

aspiration and application experienced by participants from under-represented groups at undergraduate level, still apply at postgraduate level?

There is 1100 data set from Kingston and Brighton Universities. Got respondents to questionnaire by visiting lectures and doing lecture shouts. There will also be interviews of 10 people per institution. There will be a 'blog' of comments on the research so that those not interviewed are able to respond to the findings as they are released.

### **Week Commencing 2nd October 2006**

Wednesday 4th October

Attended the School of Advanced Study Open Evening. Shared stall with Postgraduate Caseworker Annie Mitchell from ULU so was able to discuss postgraduate issues and was able to talk to a number of postgraduates throughout the evening on issues that might affect them and other groups and organisations to which they can find support.

Visited Tim Roll-Pickering at Birkbeck Freshers Fayre and met with Ismail Malik briefly before catching train to Birmingham.

Friday 6th October

QAA Complaints and Appeals Code of Practice Revision Working Group : Royal Society of Arts.

This is the working group revising the Code of Practice and submitting drafts to the higher education sector for agreement.

There was a discussion on the OIA and concerns over how they go about their business and involve themselves in institutional procedures.

It was noted that from an Academic Registrars Council meeting, the OIA should come up with the worth of a claim judgement rather than lots of documents being sent to institutions.

A concern was raised that OIA starting to look at case before letter of completion from institution received. The work generated by OIA significant. NPC see the ability to look before letter received beneficial where necessary to prompt institutions to send a letter of completion.

The volume of traffic dealing with OIA increased compared to visitorial system.

There was also a discussion on how codes of practice should be framed in audience. Should they go to institutions, those within institutions or students. It was agreed to steer towards institutions.

Discussion of creating a student factsheet or student friendly guide for institutions.

It was raised as a concern that there was a move to the code being used in legal judgements.

The time to complain was also raised with student given six years to sue for breach of contract. OIA gives 3 months from completion of procedures letter.

There was also a discussion on natural justice with some institutions not understanding the term. It was agreed that it would be easier for institutions to understand if it was rephrased as Principles of fair process and focus on staff training to understand.

Ombudsman / adjudicator. There was a discussion on a local ombudsman scheme which had been raised by Baroness Ruth Deech in the Guardian. Cardiff noted like NPC that they preferred the Student Union to ensure impartiality.

The introduction to the code was discussed with a move to effective practice rather than best or good practice.

### **Week Commencing 9th October 2006**

Most of the week was spent preparing and collating evidence for the RAE submission. The consultation document is extremely narrow, so while the NPC will respond to those questions it will also present its opinions on research funding.

Thursday 12th October

Attended the UCU Conference on Funding and Assessing Research after 2008. Spoke to Rob Copeland about the PGs who teach charter which should be launching very soon.

The day was divided into several presentations and then discussions in breakout rooms.

It was noted Australia was formerly only metrics based on research funding but is moving towards more qualitative methods.

In the discussions sessions there were some interesting views shared and particularly the lack of mention to the social sciences in the consultation.

There seemed to be an agreement on a need to move towards a basket of metrics.

A fundamental question raised throughout was what is HE for; teaching, research and the link between. There was also a question over research concentration.

UCU had asked their members for their views and 70% think research should be quality assessed.

Creativity, originality, excitement in research was wanted by lots of respondents. Importance of user impact was raised.

Linking teaching and research

Deficiencies of the RAE: i) Lack of transparency, ii) conservative bias towards discovered research rather than application, iii) Discipline — influenced by what reviewers want iv) value for money, v) damage to scholarly activities such as teaching and writing textbooks.

Friday 13th October — submitted RAE response before deadline.

### **Week Commencing 16th October 2006**

Friday 20th — Aldwych meeting Imperial College London.

There were not quite as many needed to be quorate but the following were in attendance: Nottingham, Leeds, Bristol, LSE, Manchester, Warwick, Imperial, Glasgow, Sheffield.

Brian would meet with the chief exec and chair of Russell Group and asked for topics to discuss. Issues people wanted to raise were: student feedback, student transcripts. Link to academic judgement and concern by academics that feedback will prompt more complaints — need to maintain analysis of process.

The future of UUK — concern over Aldwych pulling out of UUK. Manchester want to voice own opinion without the constraints of UUK.

Government view on academics spying on students.

RAE — Russell group funding opinion, link to metrics and departmental closures

Student contract. Bristol have large student focussed contract with smaller rules on institution. Leeds find it extremely useful as it lists what students can expect.

Variable fees — how far do they want to go.

Intellectual property rights — impact on research students; sale of research and income generation.

Student observer status on Russell group.

There also followed a discussion on an Aldwych fund and a member of staff, either researcher or administrator to enable Aldwych activities to be co-ordinated and share action in spirit of what Aldwych group created for.

Saturday 21st met Ama from NUS NEC (block of 12). We discussed mutual issues and particularly working on the NUS anti-bullying campaign with a focus on postgraduates. Also discussed ongoing projects related to welfare that Ama would be able to link into. We discussed the Impact of debt and the research Quad Research did on our behalf and working with Richard Angell on Council Tax.

We discussed the anti-bullying work and the survey Ama was going to launch. The NPC would signpost it for postgraduates to take part and I suggested some amendments to gather postgraduate views. I would also help try and find someone to attend the anti-bullying rally in Leicester to show importance of postgraduates being affected by bullying.

## **Week Commencing 23rd October 2006**

Wednesday 25th attended the Quality Takes Time event in London at which communications officer Chris was present. This was an introduction to the student written submission for new officers and those familiar with the process and covered the changes to the process. I delivered a workshop on including postgraduates in the process in which I was helped by Janet Bohrer from the QAA. The discussion was useful and I was able to meet with Sussex Students Union VP Education. Following on from the session I have been in discussion with Coventry about reaffiliating.

Sunday 29th October. Attended the NUS Admission Impossible demo walking with Dan Snowdon and Tim Roll-Pickering in the London contingent. The march was well attended and the weather made a great day. The speeches at Trafalgar Square were great, particularly Tony Benn.

## **Week Commencing 30th November 2006.**

Monday 30th November. Went to Reading to meet Pam Denicolo, Director of Graduate School for Social Sciences to discuss UKGRAD Rugby Team Project on the PhD. Got copy of Chris Park's paper on (Re)defining the PhD which provided a useful discussion on the influences on the UK PhD and discussed using NPC OGM as way to gain feedback on student views of the PhD.

Met up with new President of Reading Postgraduate Association. This is newly being formed with support from the new Graduate Schools of Social Sciences and Arts and Humanities and we were able to discuss the NPC supporting and working with the association and Reading reaffiliating.

Following that I was able to attend the official opening of the Whiteknights Graduate School which was opened by Sir Gareth Roberts.

Tuesday 31st October. Went to the SRHE event at UCE Birmingham 'Focussing on the 'F' word' which discussed the effect of fees on higher education. Wes, NUS VP Education, presented on the NUS and its opposition on fees and there was some interesting discussion on supporting and funding part-time students and the impact of debt. Was able to discuss postgraduate issues with Janet Bohrer from QAA and with Sam Lyle from Warwick University.

Thursday 2nd November. The NPC and I were cited in response to the HEPI report on teaching in universities and Postgraduates undertaking teaching. It was noted postgraduates were more likely to be used in older universities. The concern over postgraduates teaching and the noting of the large number teaching links nicely to the forthcoming UCU — NPC Postgraduate Charter on Postgraduates who teach.

## Week Commencing 6th November 2006

Alongside finalising details for the OGM at York I have been completing overdue paperwork and emails.

The new website is also nearly complete and this has prompted some musing on material and future developments of the site. Many thanks must be given to Andrew Green for completing it alongside family commitments.

The screenshot shows the homepage of the National Postgraduate Committee (NPC). At the top right, there is a search bar with the text "Search: Enter keywords" and a "GO" button. The main header features the NPC logo, which consists of the letters "npc" in a dark blue font next to a circular emblem containing a stylized globe, followed by the text "the national postgraduate committee".

On the left side, there is a vertical navigation menu with the following items: "Postgraduate Facts and Issues", "Features", "The NPC", "The Journal of Graduate Education", "Contact Us", "NPC Wales", "PCO-R Cymru", "NPC Scotland", "NPC in Northern Ireland", "Disclaimer", "Campaigns", and "What is, Where can I find, How do I...".

The main content area is divided into three columns. The top right column contains a text box with the following text: "The National Postgraduate Committee is a charity to advance, in the public interest, postgraduate education in the UK. We are made up of postgraduate student representatives from educational institutions with postgraduate students. The NPC aims to promote the interests of postgraduates studying in the UK, while remaining politically non-aligned. The Committee holds an annual conference, and publishes various guidelines and codes of practice. Wherever on this site you see this padlock symbol, it is to indicate that a site resource is available only to connections from an affiliated institution's network, or to individuals connecting from home with a username and password."

The middle column is titled "Postgraduate News" and features a red horizontal line. Below the line is the "HIGHER" logo, followed by the headline "Academia has sold out, 72% believe". The text below reads: "Bums on seats' wins out over 'speaking truth to power', reports Phil Baty Higher education is 'selling its soul' as managerialism, regulation and the drive to get 'bums on seats' replace the wider human good of academe, according to explosive new research." Below this is another headline "Bad managers put six 'at risk'" and text: "A string of self-inflicted problems, including management incompetence, revealed in letters sent out by the funding council. Phil Baty reports Six higher education institutions officially deemed to be a 'at risk' of financial collapse have all been blighted by poor management, The Times Higher has learnt." At the bottom of this column is a link: "Waste of space' - staff are ticked off".

The right column is titled "Coming Events" and features a blue horizontal line. Below the line is the headline "Ordinary General Meeting" and text: "Saturday 11 - Sunday 12 November 2006". Below this is another section titled "New Features" with a purple horizontal line. Below the line is the headline "NPC meets Minister for HE" and text: "by Simon Felton 23 October 2006". At the bottom of this column is a link: "Affiliation forms available online".

Postgraduate Facts and Issues

Features

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The Journal of Graduate Education

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## NPC Guidelines

The NPC is well known for the "Guidelines" series. Each booklet provides a set of draft guidelines on which institutions can base their own guidelines. They provide a basis for the promotion of good practice within institutions, and support for individual postgraduates or their representatives to argue for improved provision. All are kept under review, and are revised and updated as a result of the latest developments.

- [Guidelines on Codes of Practice for Postgraduate Research](#), 1992.  
This sets out minimum guidelines for research students (on doctoral or Masters' programmes), their supervisors and departments. It highlights the importance of the processes of supervision and appraisal.
- [Guidelines for Instructional Postgraduate Courses](#), 1993.  
Complementing the research guidelines, these cover taught Masters' and diploma courses, emphasising the importance of course design and mechanisms for feedback.
- [Guidelines for the Employment of Postgraduate Students as Teachers](#), 1994.  
In the light of the increased use of postgraduates as teachers, these guidelines argue for high quality teaching, underpinned by training, proper remuneration and support, and maximum workloads.
- [Guidelines for the Conduct of Research Degree Appeals](#), 1995.  
Research degrees are very different in nature to taught degrees; assessment is necessarily more subjective and qualitative. These guidelines provide rigorous appeals procedures tailored to the needs of research degrees.
- [Guidelines on Accommodation and Facilities for Postgraduate Research](#), 1995.  
The newest publication in the series covers the area of academic accommodation and facilities, including the need for good provision of offices, common rooms, libraries and computing facilities, and the importance of easy access for all sections of the student community.
- [Guidelines on the Provision of Exclusive Postgraduate Facilities](#), 2003.  
These guidelines consist of a series of articles by the NPC on the provision of facilities for postgraduates and their families.

## this section...

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