



The National Postgraduate Committee
Ordinary General Meeting
Saturday 11th — Sunday 12th November 2006

Hosted by:

THE UNIVERSITY *of York*

university of york graduate students' association



Ordinary General Meeting of the National Postgraduate Committee
11/12 November 2006, University of York, Vanbrugh College.

- 1.0 Sederunt and Apologies — *this is where we record those present and in what capacity and record any apologies for not attending.*
 - 2.0 Chair's address
 - 3.0 Minutes
 - 3.1 Minutes of the NPC Management Subcommittee: Keele Postgraduate Association
 - 4.0 Matters arising — *this is your opportunity to discuss issues raised in the minutes.*
 - 5.0 Motions
 - 6.0 Financial Report — Attached Separately
 - 7.0 Reports
 - 7.1 General Secretary — Simon Felton
 - 7.2 NPC Scotland (Chairperson) — Jim Ewing
 - 7.3 Conference Secretary — David Thurkettle
 - 7.4 Communications Officer — Chris Whittaker
 - 7.5 Equal Opportunities Officer — Armineh Soorenian
 - 7.6 Project Officers
 - 7.6.1 Chandan Singh
 - 7.6.2 Rhys Kearney
 - 7.6.3 Dan Snowdon
 - 7.6.4 Alex Higgins
 - 7.7 Journal of Graduate Education — Dr Martin Gough
 - 7.8 Any other reports
 - 7.8.1 Chris Norris — Notice of Resignation from position of Minutes Secretary
- Please note: the Chairperson, Minutes Secretary, and ordinary Executive Officers are not required to give reports, though they may wish to do so.
- 8.0 Election of Office Bearers
 - 8.1 NPC Minutes Secretary (1 position)
 - 9.0 Elections to Conferences — *this is where we elect delegates or observers to conferences or events.*
 - 9.1 UKCGE (United Kingdom Council for Graduate Education) Winter Conference.
 - 9.2 Eurodoc Nice Conference
 - 10.0 Consultations — *this is where we approve consultations submitted on behalf of the NPC and consider any consultations which the NPC wishes to provide a submission.*
 - 10.1 Reform of higher education research assessment and funding
 - 10.2 Immigration charging consultation
 - 10.3 NPC/NUS Submission to DFES/DLGC. Submitted for comments
 - 11.0 Any Other Business
 - 12.0 Date and Time of next meeting

3.0 Minutes

Summary Minutes of the NPC Management Sub-Committee Meeting
Held at Keele Postgraduate Association on Sunday 10th September 2006.

The meeting started at 1.30 pm following the training weekend with notes taken by Marilyn Shanks and Simon Felton by consensus of the meeting.

1. Sederunt

Present: Jen Winter (Chairperson), Simon Felton (General Secretary), Tim Roll-Pickering (Treasurer), Chris Whittaker (Communications Officer), David Thurkettle (Conference Secretary), Chandan Singh (Project Officer), Jim Ewing (NPC Scotland Chair), Dan Snowdon (Project Officer), Armineh Soorenian (Equal Opps Officer), Rhys Kearney (Project Officer), Marilyn Shanks (Ordinary Officer).

Apologies: Chris Norris (Minutes Secretary), Alex Higgins (Project Officer), Matt Daley (Ordinary Officer).

2. Matters Arising

Simon outlined the aim of the MSC meeting being an introductory meeting but with a need to decide some outcomes on Eurodoc planning and for a introductory finance report and an update on current projects that the NPC is involved with.

3. Finance Report.

Tim noted the report had been emailed to the MSC and that it was available online and linked to from the online forums.

The current balance is £23,912.21

Three outstanding liabilities: two payments of tax and NI contributions.

There are two debtors, Leeds 2005 conference costs and York. Jen clarified that Tim would need to speak to the York GSA administrator.

Income to date is £6 which is two individual donations.

Current expenditure is for exec expenses, salary, travel and the presentation folders at £1109.41.

Regarding closing the 2006 conference account, there are a few outstanding payments due but speaker expenses had now been paid.

Regarding exec expenses Tim clarified that officers should in first instance seek money from their local union or association. There had been previous problems in past with

expenditure assumed to be coming from NPC budget. For accommodation, people should pay up front and claim back.

David queried why local unions should have bear costs associated with officers who are members of MSC. Tim clarified that financial problems in the past together with MSC members often being delegates too should make local unions the first source of costs.

Tim clarified that regarding claims and expenses, if they had not been claimed after 2 years the cheques would be written off.

4. Eurodoc.

Simon outlined the need to discuss location and set in motion the preparation.

It was agreed that Simon would look at the costs for Birmingham and Marilyn would look at the costs for London. These costs would be sent to the MSC by the 18th to take a vote on the final location of the conference.

It was agreed that everyone would be added to the Eurodoc-conference mailing list and if they did not wish to remain so to remove themselves.

5. QAA Student Board Member

Simon outlined that he had received a letter from the QAA seeking nominations for the QAA Student Board member. The current student board member Andre Oboler would be leaving the post shortly and the NPC alongside NUS and NUS Scotland and Wales was invited to submit proposed members.

It was agreed to email out expressions of interest and to add such a request to the forum with a vote subsequently on preferred candidates.

6. AOB.

Simon clarified that he sent out weekly reports on his activities to the MSC list and were people happy for this arrangement with email concerns. This was agreed as acceptable.

Simon would also add these reports to the forum for wider discussion.

The meeting closed at 2.30 p.m.

7.0 Reports

7.1 General Secretary — 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

7.2 NPC Scotland (Chairperson) — Jim Ewing

Verbal Report to be given.

7.3 Conference Secretary — David Thurkettle

7.4 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.

7.5 Equal Opportunities Officer — 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.

7.6 Project Officers

7.6.1 Chandan Singh

My report is about findings of accommodation issues among students 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

7.6.2 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.

7.6.3 Dan 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 1st 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.

7.6.4 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.

7.7 Journal of Graduate Education — Dr Martin Gough

7.8 Any other reports

7.8.1 Chris Norris — Notice of Resignation from position of Minutes Secretary

Hi everyone,

This probably won't come as a surprise, but after some consideration I have decided it would be best if you tried to find someone else to be Minutes Secretary at the OGM.

This is nothing against NPC, which I think has a great deal of potential this year with a good team involved. Essentially, my personal and work circumstances make it impossible for me to meet this commitment while working full-time and studying part-time.

I could attempt to make it on Saturday but I'm meant to be going to Nottingham on Sunday to pick up an award from the Union, with a meal the night before. It would be possible but not particularly desirable to travel from Reading to York to Nottingham and back to Reading in a day to make the formal meeting!

Excuses over, on a more positive note I am pleased to inform you that a new NPC Rep has been elected at Nottingham (who will hopefully make the OGM - shall I tell them they have to do

the minutes???) and that a sabbatical PGSA President is in the process of being elected!

Good luck for the OGM and sorry for letting you down,
Chris x

8.0 Elections of Office Bearers

8.1 NPC Minutes Secretary (1 position)

Description of duties of Minutes Secretary from By-laws.

2.6 Minutes Secretary

2.6.1 The Minutes Secretary shall:

- a) Take minutes during General Meeting and MSC meetings, which shall include a record of all decisions made, and the figures of any vote where a count is requested.
- b) Write up the minutes for presentation to the following General Meeting and/or MSC meeting.

2.6.2 The outgoing Minutes Secretary shall be responsible for writing up the minutes at which his/her successor was elected.

9.0 Elections to Conferences

9.1 UKCGE (United Kingdom Council for Graduate Education) Winter Conference.

UKCGE was founded in 1994, under the Chairship of Professor Robert Burgess, to champion the interests of graduate education. The current Chair is Professor Malcolm McCrae.

UKCGE promotes:

- the interests of graduate education across all disciplines in Higher Education Institutions (HEIs)
- a distinct identity for graduate education and research in higher education
- the development of quality and quality measures for graduate education and research conducted in HEIs
- the effective leadership and management of postgraduate students the status, education and training of postgraduate students
- effective infrastructural provisions for graduate education (including appropriate funding)
- equal opportunities for students in graduate education
- the professional development and status of staff and supervisors in HEIs

13th February 2007 Novotel, York (2 positions).

The Winter Conference is a one-day event and usually includes two plenary speakers and a series of workshop sessions. The Council's Annual General Meeting is held during this Conference, which is also the occasion for elections to the Executive and a report to members that includes a review of Council business and accounting procedures.

9.2 Eurodoc Nice Conference

EURODOC is the European Council of doctoral candidates and young researchers. It takes the form of a federation of national associations of Ph.D. candidates and young researchers.

EURODOC's objectives are:

- To represent doctoral candidates and junior researchers at the European level in matters of education, research, and professional development of their careers.
- To advance the quality of doctoral programmes and the standards of research activity in Europe.
- To promote the circulation of information on issues regarding young researchers; organize events, take part in debates and assist in the elaboration of policies about Higher Education and Research in Europe.
- To establish and promote co-operation between national associations representing doctoral candidates and junior researchers within Europe.

Doctoral Programmes in Europe" Nice, France, 7—9 December 2006 (1 position)

The conference will bring together representatives from academia, experts, policy-makers and other stakeholders to discuss all aspects of doctoral programmes in order to develop final recommendations which will be presented to the Ministers of Education at the next meeting of the Bologna Process in May 2007 (London, UK).

EURODOC is a key actor for the success of this conference on Doctoral programmes. Thanks to financial support from the European Commission, 30-40 Eurodoc delegates will be able to participate to the conference. These delegates are doctoral candidates involved in national organisations recognised as members and observers within Eurodoc, thus bringing extensive expertise of the situation of doctoral programmes and of doctoral candidates' conditions in their country and throughout Europe.

10. Consultations

The General Meeting approves consultations that have been sent on its behalf and is able to discuss its views on consultations in shaping responses.

10.1 Reform of higher education research assessment and funding

Consultation Response Form

Please Specify:

The NPC is the primary representative body of postgraduate researchers and students in the United Kingdom. Our affiliate membership comprises of democratically-elected student Representative bodies at Higher Education Institutes (HEIs) throughout the UK. As a registered charity (SC033368), our aim is the promotion of postgraduate education in the United Kingdom. In order to achieve this aim, we host and address conferences, share best practice through publications and meetings, respond to consultations and campaign on issues of concern to postgraduates. We also co-operate with other democratic student bodies and trades unions who share our aims.

The National Postgraduate Committee welcome the opportunity to comment on the proposed changes to research assessment and funding by commenting on the specific questions in the DfES document "Reform of Higher Education Research and Assessment and Funding: A Consultation Document".

1 Which, if any, of the RAE 2008 panels might adopt a greater or wholly metrics-based approach?

Comments:

The National Postgraduate Committee believes existing criteria should be applied based on the Government's decision that RAE 2008 will proceed in principle. The NPC believes that all subjects should remain largely peer reviewed, adopting a minimum of metrics-based assessment.

The National Postgraduate Committee believes that the most important concern is whether the outcome of RAE 2008 and any shadow metric exercise will be allowed to determine funding.

2 Have we identified all the important metrics? Bearing in mind the need to avoid increasing the overall burden of data collection on institutions, are there other indicators that we should consider?

Comments:

The National Postgraduate Committee believes that all the important metrics have not been identified. We believe that there should be a single coherent framework that encompasses research quality assessment and research funding. QR funding which supports infrastructure, research capacity and staff costs should encompass quality assessment metrics.

Metrics required for quality assessment should include some form of peer review, a value added metric, such as total research income as ratio of QR income and an output metric.

Any metric-based approach should be concerned with inputs and outputs.

Metrics for basic research infrastructure should consider the number of PGR students and number of staff on contracts requiring them to do research, the mix of subject areas and output factors such as publications benchmarked against world averages.

3 Which of the alternative models described in this chapter do you consider to be the most suitable for STEM subjects? Are there alternative models or refinements of these models that you would want to propose?

Comments:

The National Postgraduate Committee does not believe any of the models would be suitable as they rely on a single metric. The NPC believes that while science and technology subjects might benefit from metrics based approach, all subjects should remain largely peer reviewed and adopt a minimum of metrics-based assessment.

The focus on STEM subjects also implies a separation from other subjects and we believe that any changes to the funding system should be fairly balanced to cover all subjects; a single system should allow discipline specific modifications. This would be necessary to prevent unfair funding distribution and to all new cross-disciplinary research

4 What, in your view, would be an appropriate and workable basis for assessing and funding research in non-STEM subjects?

Comments:

The National Postgraduate Committee believes that all subjects should remain largely peer reviewed and adopt a minimum of metrics-based assessment. We recognise that there exists a limit amount of metrics-based assessment and believe that any changes to the system should create a system that works for all subjects and disciplines and maintains a limited level of metrics-based assessment. We believe that any changes to metrics in the non-STEM subjects should be fairer and focus on outputs and inputs alongside peer review.

The use of a standard system for all subjects, with a form of metrics in a common framework that can have subject grouping variation would be a minimum assessment alongside a broad panel of experts that would act as a peer review and monitor of subject metrics.

5 What are the possible undesirable behavioural consequences of the different models and how might the effects be mitigated?

Comments:

The National Postgraduate Committee notes several concerns based on changes to the funding system proposed by the consultation. We believe the models are biased against new researchers as departments seek to build experienced researchers for metric output. We further feel that the focus of the changes

should encompass training and development of researchers to ensure quality research is taking place and provide opportunities for new researchers. Moves to increase equal opportunities must be maintained and any move by metrics to increase the attractiveness of a 'transfer market' must be prevented.

The models are also biased towards established centres and against new research subject areas. The proposed system's change of focus on output measures to input measures instead is concerning in that it will destabilise the system by introducing a lack of clarity and reduce quality and quantity of the research output.

The dissemination of information is important and the proposals do not go far enough to encourage the use of textbooks and other publications for dissemination. The focus on metrics may also further disadvantage teaching based institutions focussing less on publications.

6 In principle, do you believe that a metrics-based approach for assessment or funding can be used across all institutions?

Comments:

The National Postgraduate Committee believe that if the system takes account of our concerns in our responses Qs 2-5 and ensures a strong basis of peer-review then there is no reason against this approach being used across all institutions. We do feel however that there is a move to consider metrics afresh recognising the concerns raised in this response.

7 Should the funding bodies receive and consider institutions' research plans as part of the assessment process?

Comments:

The National Postgraduate Committee believes that funding bodies should receive institutions' research plans but that these should form only a part of the metrics base-line funding.

8 How important do you feel it is for there to continue to be an independent assessment of UK higher education research quality for benchmarking purposes? Are there other ways in which this could be accomplished?

Comments:

The National Postgraduate Committee believes that benchmarking is positive tool and should be reflected in research funding but that benchmarking should be a separate function to the allocation of all research funding.

Benchmarking takes place in the public sector to assess and evaluate performance but is rarely used as a sole determinant of funding. The opportunity for benchmarking is for capacity building to encourage funding as a tool alongside other criteria.

10.2 Immigration charging consultation

A Consultation on a New Charging Regime for Immigration & Nationality Fees

The following extracts are taken from the Consultation on a New Charging Regime for Immigration and Nationality Fees. The consultation is particularly important in its effect on prospective postgraduate students, current postgraduate students and those writing up who may require more time to remain in the UK.

Proposals and Questions

2.1 There are a number of different options, and combinations of options, that we have identified that would generate the level of revenue needed to deliver the step change in enforcement and compliance activity and to introduce the programme of new control measures. Below we have set out some of them.

Simple apportionment and flexible pricing, including taking account of the value of the service

2.2 i) One approach would be to recover the costs of administering visa and in-country applications by type. This would have the advantage of simplicity, but would limit our flexibility in determining fee levels, and would not allow us to take factors such as the prices of key international competitor countries into consideration for certain routes.

ii) Alternatively we could price in a flexible manner taking a number of factors into consideration. These could include the value of the entitlements to the migrant, the degree to which attracting them here is in the interests of the UK; demand; or the fees charged by other countries for similar applications.

iii) Or we could look at the value of an application based only on the benefit to the applicant of the entitlements associated with a particular route. These could include whether a successful applicant would be able to work in the UK; whether they could bring dependants with them; and whether there was a route to settlement in due course.

Q1 Do you think that we should set prices flexibly to take into account wider policy objectives such as attracting international students and people on business?

Q2 Should prices reflect a range of factors, or only those that are of value to the migrant?

Q3 Do you think that applications for citizenship should be priced according to value or the costs of processing the application?

A common price structure for IND and UKvisas?

2.3 The Home Affairs Committee recently recommended that the calculation of in-country and visa fees should be reviewed and greater alignment considered in terms of the costs that are taken into account.²

2.4 At present, IND and UKvisas both use pricing models which essentially reflect the administrative costs of processing applications. In addition, a contribution is made towards general overheads. Since April 2005, in-country leave to remain fees also include some of the costs of running an associated appeals system. Because of the differing costs involved in processing applications in the UK and overseas and because of different ways of calculating overheads, the fees for processing applications for similar types of application are significantly different depending on whether the application is made at one of our visa issuing posts or in the UK. For example the cost of applying for a visa to study at university is £85 but the cost of applying by post to extend that leave in the UK is £250.

2.5 There are varying degrees of alignment which might be considered between Ukvisas and IND's pricing structures. These range from ensuring that both organisations use the same transparent formulae for calculating their costs, to amalgamating their costs and obtaining a common cost basis, or simply charging the same prices for their services whether obtained in the UK or overseas.

2.6 One of the objectives of the PBS is to produce an immigration system for work and study in the UK that acts as a coherent whole and that is joined up from end to end from the perspective of its users. Greater alignment between IND and UKvisas would support this objective. But it would need to be considered in the light of research on the effect on demand and the competitive environment for our services.

Q4 With which of the following statements do you agree:

- a) Fees should be set to help promote the UK as a competitive destination
 - b) Fees should be set according to the same principles, but might vary between the UK and overseas
 - c) Fees for the same service should be the same in the UK and overseas
- (You may choose more than one option)**

Work permits, students and sponsorship

2.7 At present most fees are paid by migrants themselves. The exception to this is the work permit system, where work permits are generally paid for by the employer of the migrant, and employers may or may not also pay for the applicant's immigration decision. This system will end with the introduction of the PBS and will be replaced with a single decision supported by a certificate of sponsorship provided by a UKbased and registered sponsor. We expect that the new system will make it faster and less bureaucratic for trusted employers to bring migrants to the UK.

2.8 Students coming to the UK under the new PBS will also need a certificate of sponsorship, and educational institutions may choose to pass the costs of this onto students, for example through tuition fees, or to absorb this cost themselves.

2.9 We are still considering how best the system might work, to streamline the process as much as possible. We are clear that these changes need to go hand in hand with improvements to the services offered by IND and UKvisas to help ensure that sponsors understand their responsibilities and are able to check easily that they are acting legally. We also need to consider how to recover the costs of running the sponsorship process and the administration of certification. We think that one way to do this may be to charge sponsors an annual registration fee plus a small charge for every certificate of sponsorship they issue. This would mean that those who benefit from the immigration system, by being able to bring in those migrants they need for work or study, would meet the costs. We particularly want to understand the implications of this proposed approach for small and medium businesses and for groups, and welcome responses on this issue in particular.

Q5 Should employers and educational institutions be able to include payment of visa fees within sponsorship and certificate fees for international employees and students?

Q6 What help would sponsors need to ensure that they are acting legally in bringing in particular migrants?

Q7 How might any impact on small and medium-sized businesses be minimised?

Q8 What special measures might be needed for cultural and specialist groups?

Q9 Do you think that any of the proposals outlined would impact adversely upon community relations?



Postgraduate Council
Tax



This paper has been developed on request of the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) for consideration by the Minister for Higher Education, Bill Rammell MP, and his government colleagues in the Department for Local Government and Communities (DLGC). The case for change in this paper supports arguments put forward in a joint meeting of the National Postgraduate Committee (NPC), the National Union of Students (NUS) and Bill Rammell MP.

The Status Quo

There are two problems:

- i. The differing arrangements and lack of clarity for “writing up postgraduates” and their council tax exemption status and the financial burden this puts on students while trying to finish a thesis needed to complete the qualification; and
- ii. The council tax charges in the transition between undergraduate and postgraduate study – very likely for PGCE students – who find themselves eligible for council tax payment between the end of June (when they finish their undergraduate degree) and the start of October (when their PGCE, masters, or PhD starts).

i. The “writing up” students:

The situation is very different in different institutions around the country who have a variety of local agreements in place. In some places the institution has played a positive role in this regard but in others they wash their hands of the students and leave them to the fate of the council officer that is processing the exemptions or not.

Places that have very positive policies include:

Kings College London:

"If you are a postgraduate student writing up on a full time basis, we will be able to provide you with an exemption certificate covering your period of study and the period that you are registered as writing up. When you submit your council tax exemption certificate to your Local Authority, you should enclose a letter from your supervisor that confirms your full time status."

Kent:

"Postgraduate Research Students who are writing up can claim exemption for 12 months from the date of their completion date."

Sheffield:

"PhD students in their writing up year need to collect a special form from SSiD which requires their supervisor's signature, before they can be issued with a Council Tax Exemption letter."

Imperial:

"MPhil/PhD students are permitted to write up their thesis in College for six months immediately following the end of their registration. This allows you to have access to the library and College facilities, without paying any fees. You will need to complete an Application for [Writing Up Status](#). Please note, the application for Writing Up will not be processed until an Examination Entry has been submitted. The Writing Up period cannot be extended beyond six months, but students may continue to write up away from College for the life of the Examination Entry."

Edinburgh:

“PhD students who are writing up can be classed as a ‘student’ until the end of their fourth year of study. M.Phil and M.Lit students can classed as a ‘student’ up to the end of their third year of study.”

Leeds:

Students who have been classed as full time for the duration of their postgraduate are entitled to one years council tax exemption in their ‘writing up’ period.

“If you are an International ‘writing up’ student and live in a property where the Council Tax is payable to Leeds City Council then you are treated by the council as a full time student for Council Tax purposes for the whole period you are registered with the University, including your ‘writing up’ period. To claim this exemption you should obtain a student certificate.”

There are places that are less helpful policies:

Cardiff:

“Postgraduate students in the writing-up stage not eligible to receive an exemption certificate.”

Royal College, University of London:

“Postgraduate Research students on their writing-up years will be issued a standard certifying letter and it will be up to the local Council to decide on the student's eligibility.”

Hull:

“If you have completed the prescribed period of study for your programme but are ‘writing up’ you are not – in law – regarded as a registered student. Therefore you do not meet the above criteria for exemption/discount from the tax, and the University will not therefore be able to provide you with a certificate for that period.”

Goldsmiths:

“If you are Writing Up your thesis, you will not be exempt from paying council tax.”

York:

“Students who have exceeded the normal period of full-time registration are not counted as registered students. Such students are therefore not exempt from Council Tax, and the Graduate Schools Office cannot produce exemption letters or certificates for them.”

And there are places who seem to charge for “writing up” status which may or may not permit them from getting the exemption certificate:

Birmingham:

“Once you have completed your formal period of registration you will be required to pay a continuation fee in each academic session until such time as your thesis is submitted. The continuation fee for the 2005–06 academic session will be £125, and this will be reviewed for subsequent years. There will be no refund if you submit your thesis during the course of the academic session, as many of the costs associated with the examination of a thesis will already have been incurred, and some will continue throughout the examination period. Students who transfer to writing-up status part way through the academic session will be charged a pro-rata continuation fee for that session only. If a student proceeds to a further academic session, they will be required to pay the full continuation fee, which is currently £125. An exemption certificate is not produced for research students in writing-up status who pay only a continuation fee, as they are not normally eligible for exemption from council tax.”

Oxford:

“Once a graduate student has met the fee for their course of study and is, therefore, beyond fee liability they can ask for Writing Up Status. The College offers Writing Up Status to students who intend to remain in or near Oxford and would like to continue to use College facilities. For D.Phil. students fee liability ends after nine terms. Fee liability for various Masters’ degrees may end after the third or sixth term. The current charge for Writing Up Status is the same as the Living Out facility charge: £52.32 per term. This charge ensures that students continue to have a pigeon-hole (if they wish) and allows them to use all other facilities of the College (WCR, Library, Computing facilities, meals in Hall, use of Laundry, etc.), subject to further charges where relevant, and receive the appropriate student subsidies and administrative support.”

Bath:

“Most full-time research students will be funded for three years, although the regulations allow up to four years for the completion of a PhD thesis. Once you have completed the minimum period of study required for your particular degree, and provided you have completed the necessary amount of work, you are eligible for transfer to either the ‘Administration’ Fee, or to the ‘Continuation’ Fee, both of which you may hear referred to as ‘writing-up’. The ‘Administration’ fee in 2005-6 is £75, and the ‘Continuation’ Fee is £474, payable on a pro-rata basis every six months. For the ‘Administration’ Fee, you are entitled to receive neither supervision nor access to the Library; for the ‘Continuation’ Fee you may receive minimal supervision plus continued access to the Library.”

Students’ unions do work on this all the time, the Union of UEA Students has recently lobbied their local authority to accept

Postgraduates as eligible for the exemption, although this is a local success members of the NPC and NUS around the country have not always been so success which makes the picture so unclear and the postcode lottery unjust.

The issues involved are most apparent in London where students at one institution do not live in one local authority but are often spread over many different authorities; this makes the situation starker and means that you have two students at the same institution living under different rules. At Queen Mary, University of London they pursued a case in the courts on behalf of a student. They were successful with the courts agreeing that the example they were presented with was classified as a student and therefore should be granted with an exemption certificate that the local authority should accept. This was a great success and students unions in other areas of the country have talked about following suit but litigation is an expensive business which limits the options.

The issue affects students in such a dramatic way and makes them feel a real sense of injustice, this is best put in the words of a student who has contacted us to help sort the situation out, they say:

"I am no longer funded by my department (funding was 50% departmental and 50% UoN) but I still have a considerable amount of lab work to do before I will be able to start writing up. My supervisor has quite clearly discouraged me from finding a job, which means I now have no income. We are not eligible to sign on (which is what she has told me to do) because we are not available for work, and so if we do it is actually benefit fraud. I have done quite a bit of investigation, but it seems that because I don't have to support any

children or dependents and because in effect not working is my "choice" there is no help available.

"My council tax will be approximately £110 per month (yearly bill paid over ten months). Of course I have saved money to cover my cost of living for a few months but only enough to cover rent/ food/ bills. As far as I can work out - it is my lack of student status that makes me eligible to pay council tax.

"What I can't understand is that the university relies on its research status, and yet isn't prepared to support the final PhD year students in order to help them focus on their research. I don't know a single person who has finished their research within 3 years, and neither are we strongly encouraged to do so, but the additional worry of financial problems doesn't help students to focus on doing good research for publication. All we are asking for is the University to maintain our registration for the fourth year of PhD study - that is all it takes is for us to remain on the lists of registered students that are sent to the council. Even if we have to pay a small administration fee I really don't see the problem to the University, for the big difference it will make to our situation."

This experience is not a single experience, students in this situation are often pressures to continue their writing up full time with no prospect of work or support from the instA student from Cardiff University who contacted us said: **"Obviously, it is very difficult (/impossible) for a full time PhD student entering a writing up stage to seek for another job in the same time. Any salary**

or income stop at the end of the 3rd year and that corresponds to the time where we are supposed to pay the council tax. Most of us have absolutely no other income, very few savings (even student loans to pay back) and still have to pay the council tax or a part of it."

ii) The transition between study:

Those between the end of a course and the start of a new one (i.e. the transition from undergraduate degree and a PGCE) is liable for council tax on their property for this period. However the national picture is very ambiguous around the country. Firstly students do not expect the charge as it the transition seems no different from the transition between years of an undergraduate degree where they are exempt, some local authorities have insufficient knowledge, information or collection arrangement to charge the student and others who levy the charge finally do so when the person has become a student again. The charge at this time is difficult to meet, can leave students in more debt, comes with a high opportunity cost or means lengthy form filling to claim the council tax benefit that they are probably eligible to but know little about. This period is normally about three months which could see students charged this proportion of an annual council tax bill. For an area which if the council tax in the area was £1000 with the single person reduction would amount to £187.50; no small fee in the longest term of the year in the run up to the festive holidays.

The Case for Change

On the first issue of the council tax for "writing up postgraduate" students, an amendment to the regulations to **grant those, yet to complete their:**

- ◆ **PhD, council tax exempt for a further two years (or at the very least one year) after their normal three years of funding.**
- ◆ **Thesis or dissertation on a Masters teaching or research programme, council tax exempt for a further year after their normal one year course.**

This is all to help the financial situation, in particular the debt levels, of students in their writing up stage – who as we have already heard are pressured by supervisors into this being a full time status. Most importantly for the government, HEIs and the students involved, increase the number of thesis that get completed and submitted. There is currently a national problem surrounding the number of students who finish the writing up stage of their PhDs (see Miranda Irving (2006) *Unfinished business*, Education Guardian:

<http://education.guardian.co.uk/egweekly/story/0,,1822428,00.htm>

), and the student movement believes that one of the contributing factors is that some postgraduates need to work more hours in order to pay the additional burden of council tax. If this barrier can be removed, completion rates could be changed giving all parties much higher returns for their investment in postgraduate education. This policy has very little cost implications, being a tiny proportion of the student council tax bill and considering some areas accept the situation already. It will also remove from the sector the current costs associated with advice and support of postgraduate students on this issue, local authorities chasing students who do not have the money every year and the cost of lobbying or legal challenges that continually arise to seek justice for these students. Unnecessary friction between students (and their students' union) and local authorities should also be avoided at all costs because together they are natural partners to deal with issues of community cohesion, the

retention of local skills and dealing with anti-social behaviour issues in the local area.

On the second issue of those in the transition stage, we ask that:

Students who have exemption certificates for two adjacent periods of study, i.e. 2005-6 and 2007-8 will be treated as continuous; any charge for time where the student is deemed to have not had exempt status is cleared even if the student has moved local authorities for the purpose of continuing study.

The case for change in this instance, other than the student will no longer be met with costs they can little afford and really inopportune moments is that it will also remove a high level of cost to the local authority. The charging and chasing of people for relatively small levels of revenue when the issue is complex, the student is normally eligible for council tax benefit – which again for the amount to money involved is an expensive process - and has to be applied retrospectively, is burdensome on the local authority.

The removal of this loophole will have no impact on the public purse as such a high proportion of these students are eligible for council tax benefit, so it will be administratively cheaper and easier to just have their contribution paid through the central government grant that reimburses local authority for the student exemptions.

The Recommendations

The NPC and NUS are jointly calling for the Lyons Review and Government to provide national clarity by making those, yet to complete their:

- ◆ PhD, council tax exempt for a further two (or at the very least one) years after their normal three years of funding.

- ◆ Thesis or dissertation on a Masters teaching or research programme, council tax exempt for a further year after their normal one year.

This is because the biggest reason students give for the non-completion of their thesis or dissertation is financial pressures (Carney, 2002, Delayed Post Graduate Completion) and because if your PhD is not written up quickly, the chance it will be written up quickly the chance it will be completed becomes very low. For PhD students the system is particularly unfair as a small proportion of students ever complete their research and submit within three years (full time).

- ◆ For students who have exemption certificates for two adjacent periods of study, i.e. 2005-6 and 2007-8 will be treated as continuous; any charge for time where the student is deemed to have not had exempt status is cleared even if the student has moved local authorities for the purpose of continuing study.

This is because the time that the charge is levied is most likely to be while the students is in receipt of a student loan or their postgraduate funding arrangement so finds the charge a significant burden. The earning potential for most students through this period is incredibly low so would most likely be eligible for Council Tax Benefit but this would add expensive procedure and administrative cost to the student, local authority and benefits agency. This loop whole should be closed so public policy clearly encourages continuing study by not adding additional prohibitive charges to the cost of education.

In Conclusion:

The Lyons Review into Local Government Financing has triggered within the student movement and beyond the debate around full time students' council tax exemption. It looks like Lyons will not seek to change that but there are some irregularities, especially for postgraduates, that should be cleared up. Currently there is a "postcode lottery" between, and sometimes within, institutions about whether research and teaching postgraduate students writing up their thesis or dissertation are council tax exempt and that there are not charges

for students for the small period of transition time in-between courses.

We hope this change meets the needs of our members and aids the government's ambitions for a highly skilled accredited workforce and a good return for the economy on the investment that is put into postgraduate education while reducing burdensome collection costs and spiralling students into more, potentially commercial, debt.

Richard Angell

National Executive Members

National Union of Students

Simon Felton

General Secretary

**National Postgraduate
Committee**



Appendix 1: Student Union Policy

The policy below is the position taken by my many constituent members of both the NUS and NPC, including the NPC itself:

Students and Council Tax

This Union Notes:

1. Local government elections for the London Boroughs are due to take place in May 2006.
2. Currently local government in Great Britain is financed by a combination of locally set Council Tax, centrally set business rates, grants from central government, local fines and other streams. (Hale, Rita and Associates "Who pays for local services? The balance of funding between government and councils" (Local Government Association, 2005), copy at <http://www.lga.gov.uk/Publication.asp?lsection=0&id=SX1135-A781FC66> accessed 2005-11-22)
3. Council Tax raises approximately 26% of local government income but is one of the few streams a local council can vary. Consequently, an increase in spending often requires a proportionally greater increase in council tax.
4. In recent years, the level of Council Tax has received much media attention and a high level of protest. Very recently, the Local Government Association of England and Wales predicted that Council Tax could rise by as much as £100 a year. (*Metro* November 22, 2005, page 2 columns 3-4)
5. Full-time students are exempt from paying Council Tax until they have "completed their course." (Part 2 of Schedule 1 to the Council Tax (Discount Disregards) Order 1992 (SI 1992 No 548) (http://www.opsi.gov.uk/si/si1992/Uksi_19920548_en_2.htm), as amended by the Council Tax (Discount Disregards) Amendment Order 1996 (SI 1996 No 636)

(http://www.opsi.gov.uk/si/si1996/Uksi_19960636_en_1.htm

) , defines a full time student as:

"A person is to be regarded as undertaking a full time course of education on a particular day if-

- a. on the day he is enrolled for the purpose of attending such a course with a prescribed educational establishment within Part I of Schedule 2 to this Order, and
- b. the day falls within the period beginning with the day on which he begins the course and ending with the day on which he ceases to undertake it, and a person is to be regarded as ceasing to undertake a course of education for the purpose of this paragraph if he has completed it, abandoned it or is no longer permitted by the educational establishment to attend it."

6. There is ambiguity over what exactly constitutes "completed their course" for research students in the writing up and beyond phase.
7. Currently the Council Tax is one of the most controversial charges of all and there are many calls for it to be amended or scrapped. (E.g. IsItFair – The Campaign for the Reform of Council Tax at <http://www.isitfair.co.uk/>)
8. One of the most common proposed alternatives is to have a Local Income Tax and some political parties have taken this up.
9. The exemption for students is not explicitly retained in some proposals for local government taxation reform.
10. The current weekly threshold for starting to pay income tax for most student jobs (approximately Tax Codes 471-500) is between £90 and £95. (Tables A – Pay Adjustment Tables (Inland Revenue, 1993), Week 1 (Apr 6 – Apr 12))

11. Due to the way in which Free Pay works and the juxtaposition of the tax year and university vacation dates, the effective threshold is even lower for those only working during vacations.

This Union Believes:

1. Students are presently financially overburdened and it would be monumentally unfair to give them the additional burden of local government taxation.
2. If the Council Tax is to be replaced, the alternative must include an explicit continuation of the student exemption.
3. The definition of a full-time student should be modified to explicitly incorporate research students in the writing up phase.

This Union Resolves

1. To lobby and campaign for the student exemption to be retained at all times, but to especially do this when there is high profile public debate on the future course of local government finance.
2. To write to relevant bodies and individuals, including but not limited to, the major political parties, the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister and any successor holding the Local Government portfolio, the Local Government Association, the Greater London Assembly, the Mayor of London and the local MP, setting out the Union's position and concern.
3. To encourage a high level of registration and voting by students in the forthcoming local government elections to show that the student vote cannot be ignored.

Appendix 2: National Union of Students Response to the Lyons Inquiry

In a recent meeting with members of NUS and the student movement, a number of issues were raised. The point was made – in line with previous submissions – that:

"Full-time students are exempt from Council Tax (CT) for a simple reason: they are, in the main, ineligible for social security benefits. Whereas those who are liable for CT can claim CT Benefit if they are on a low income, all but a small number of students would be unable to do so.

"It would clearly be unjust to deny those who cannot pay CT a means of applying for state support, so either students must be exempt or have some access to CT Benefit. But if students were liable for CT and able to apply for CT Benefit this would involve them doing so en masse each year to local authorities, who would then have to process each claim, thus creating an enormous administrative headache for a broadly similar result, given that most students do not have substantial earnings whilst they study."

We therefore see no need for this situation to change as it is the most cost effective and socially just model.

It was also highlighted that the current deadline for calculating the number of students in an area leaves too many students unaccounted for, adds an £82.5m burden to local authorities, and adds up £19 a year to the council tax bill of students' neighbours (see Donald MacLeod and agencies (2006) *University towns 'pay higher council tax'*:

<http://education.guardian.co.uk/higher/news/story/0,,1735987,00.>

[html](#)). These add to community tensions and means that local services are starved of cash to cater for students and their neighbours.

We call on the commission to change the date from the 21st October each year to later months, ideally around March and April which would plug this funding gap, give the opportunity for investment in the local area or council tax remission, and would make the council tax burden fairer for local communities.

The final issue with student council tax concerns the current postcode lottery for postgraduates who are writing up – currently the picture is very different from institution to institution and sometimes even within departments from supervisor to supervisor. Some institutions give postgraduates the council tax exemption certificate, whilst others don't. This obviously leaves an unfair and unclear situation which needs to be cleared up. There is currently a national problem surrounding the number of students who finish the writing up stage of their PhDs (see Miranda Irving (2006)

Unfinished business, Education Guardian:

<http://education.guardian.co.uk/egweekly/story/0,,1822428,00.htm>

), and the student movement believes that one of the contributing factors is that some postgraduates need to work more hours in order to pay the additional burden of council tax.

We therefore call for national clarity on this issue and for all postgraduates to be exempt for a year of writing up, in line with the current arrangements for other full time students.

Appendix 3: National Postgraduate Committee Response to the Lyons Inquiry

The National Postgraduate Committee is very pleased to be able to take this opportunity to respond to The Lyons Inquiry on the reform of Council Tax. Postgraduate students and researchers are both receiving training and contributing to the knowledge base and are actively involved in the promotion of learning and the development of the knowledge economy. Supporting students who are on low incomes and ineligible for social security benefits is just and would encourage their successful completion of their study and engagement into the knowledge economy.

The National Postgraduate Committee is formed from the representative of postgraduates from Students Associations at universities and other institutions. It represents postgraduates' interests both through these Associations and through the other educational and professional bodies with which it has links.

The National Postgraduate Committee feels strongly that any change to Council Tax must retain Full-Time students exemption from Council Tax as students are, overwhelmingly, ineligible for social security benefits. We also feel that if students were liable for Council Tax and subsequently able to access Council Tax Benefit there would be significant administrative burdens on local authorities processing each claim and that there would most likely be a large number of successful claimants as most students do not have substantial earnings.

We also note the changes to Council tax, guaranteeing students exemption while living with non-students. This is very important for

Postgraduate Students who are likely to share accommodation with other older or professional people and should remain.

We are however concerned by the continuation period where individuals may be deemed to no longer qualify for exemptions as students despite the fact they are working on their research leading up to submission. This is particularly unfair as a small proportion of students ever complete their research and submit within three years (full time). Again the status of students in their writing up period needs to be clarified. This is a very difficult and pressured time for doctoral students. If funding has ceased and they are engaged in seeking employment and writing up their research then the last thing needed is further financial disbenefit. Clearly this will have a knock-on effect on completion rates as students struggle to manage. Miranda Irving notes that HEFCE data shows a third of full time doctoral students and two thirds of part time doctoral students do not complete their degree in seven years (July 18 2006). It is important that these students do not suffer from financial hardship in attempting to complete their studies as they will be of value to the economy through training and advancement in the knowledge economy.

References:

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