

The Big Brother Cashcard?

Margaret Reed reveals a new system of monitoring students' spending behaviour at some institutions...

Warning: *your university may be planning to introduce a smart card that can be used to trace your movements and spending patterns within your institution!*

Mondex, a product of Midland Bank, is a smart card which is currently being used at only a few institutions. However, obviously Midland would not go to all this expense of developing the product and the necessary equipment without planning to introduce it to larger numbers. At present, it has only been introduced at York, Sheffield Hallam, Nottingham and Exeter, with the aim of alleviating large amounts of cash handling and reducing potential problems with security.

The *Mondex* card at York was introduced in October, combined with the library card and computer ID. Students can now buy food, borrow library books, get their laundry done and pay for drinks at the bar. The Student Union

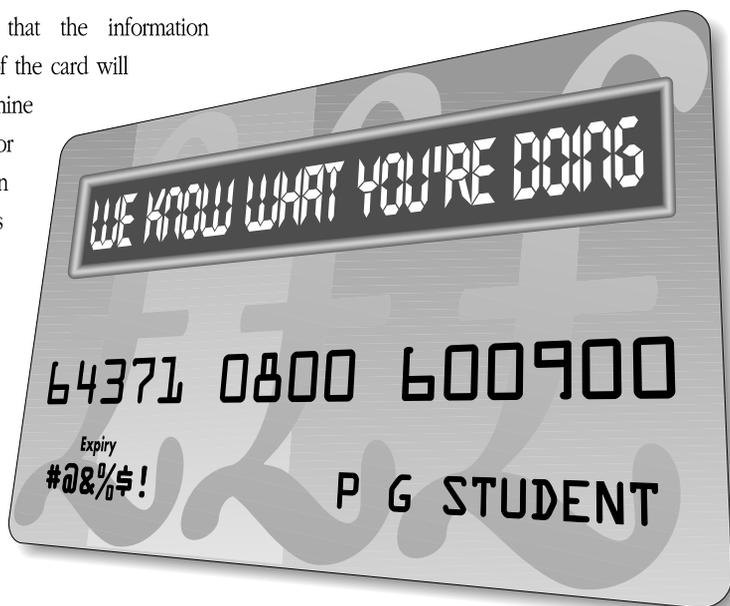
states in its opinion "there are no perceived benefits". Certainly, it seems fairly pointless for students, when the rest of the world beyond campus continues to use cash!

The intention at York is to abolish cash on campus by next year. This obviously has numerous organisational implications — and implications for being able to trace students' spending patterns: there is undoubtedly a *possibility* of misuse of the information stored on the card, although York's Vice-Chancellor has explicitly stated that the information obtained through use of the card will only be used to examine levels of sales for different products on campus, and that this would be no threat to the integrity of students' personal accounts.

There has been considerable dissatisfaction, as the scheme has gone

ahead despite opposition, particularly in the light of Midland boycotts. The York experience is that consultation took place between the Director of Finance and the Student Union — but only because there is a Union shop on campus. However, there was no consultation specifically for postgraduates for whom it has greater implications and will cause more inconvenience.

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INSIDE THIS ISSUE...

Don't Forget Your Passport: Reflections on an International Conference

Richard Race talks about his experiences in the global academic arena...

I can remember somebody saying early in the research process it was essential that the research student present his/her material to an international forum. As an inexperienced researcher I thought "you must be joking". However, now I'm further on down the research process line, I'd like to share some experiences of presenting internationally for the first time.

Why present at an international conference? The priority for me was an international publication — the conference abstracts were refereed and published in house — which looks good on a CV and future job or fellowship applications. There is also room for improvement within papers with constructive comments from international (as well as domestic) presentations for future

periodical or book publication. It was also useful networking internationally. This might sound strange but on reflection I found it slightly comforting being unaware of the majority of the people around me. Let me explain. Once you begin to get to know those in your field or subject area and become part of that field, I would suggest that personal and other expectations grow. If you are reasonably new to a group you can use this to your advantage. You can introduce yourself to a total stranger without intimidation, who you later find out is the new Dean of Sydney University and has a publication record we can all only dream about. It can also be a humbling experience when somebody gives you an email address and you suddenly put the name to the face and realise you've quoted this

individual in your thesis. Ultimately, I tend to support my supervisor's observation that international conference gives a very positive reception to a researcher.

How do you get to the international conference? You firstly need the information and knowledge concerning the conference which can come from your supervisor, department or subject bulletins or periodicals. Secondly, and fundamentally, you need the cash. I was lucky enough to be able to combine the remains of an ESRC Studentship, departmental money (expenses) and my own money.

Thirdly, you need understanding departments. The conference was held during a semester so I had to rearrange tutorials with course leaders, secretarial staff and my students. This proved difficult but not impossible.

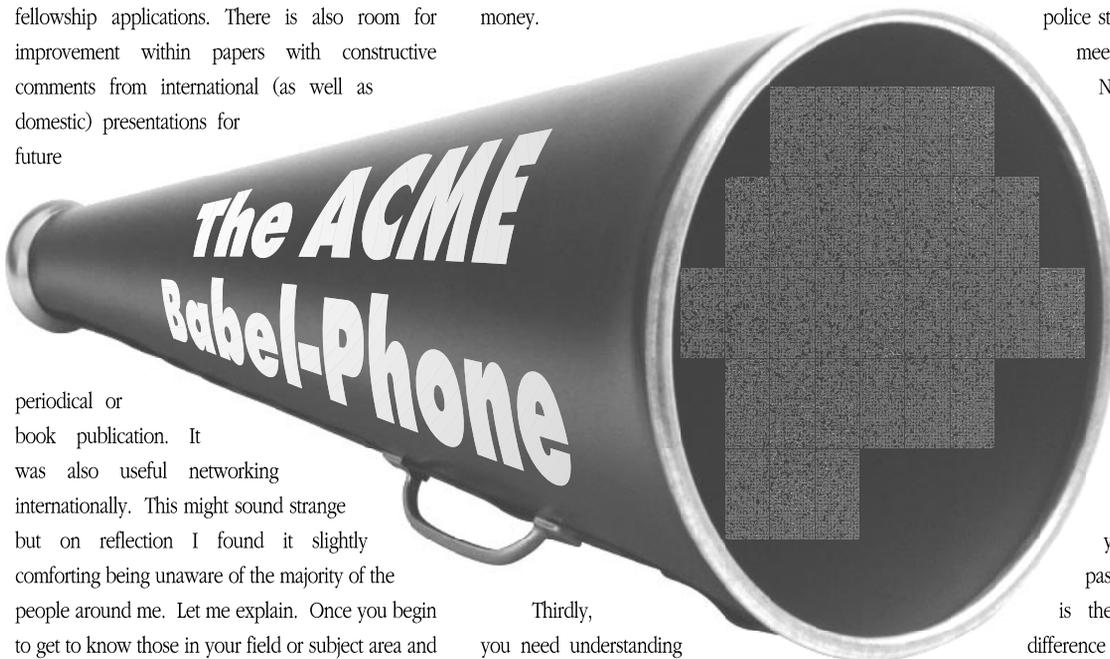
Was it worth going to the *Australian and New Zealand History of Education Society* (ANZHE) Conference held at Newcastle University, Australia. Yes! The conference was well organised and run. It was sponsored by the University and private finance

which was visible in the quality of the in house publication of conference papers. This last point is one I would hope we can develop here within the *Keele Education Discussion Support Group* (KEDSG) with regard to our future student conferences. I got some positive feedback from my paper and it was enjoyable networking with the conference delegates.

Oh yes. I 'misplaced' my passport after arriving at Newcastle airport which gave me a unique insight into the locality: I needed forms obtained from the *Student Travel Association* for a new, temporary passport; I had to 'report' the event to the local police station which also meant I got to meet half the taxi drivers in Newcastle; and, I had to go to the local post office to purchase the package which would send my temporary passport forms by overnight courier to Canberra. I called the British Embassy several times — believe me they do a good job.

Thankfully, I telephoned the airport and my passport had thankfully been handed in. If you do decide to lose your passport, do it as close to home as is theoretically possible! The time difference in Australia means at least a day's delay in temporary passport application. This could be perceived by some as a bonus, especially during an Australian summer, but a risky endeavour considering there were students back home waiting to learn more about the delights of social theory.

Richard Race is a part-time lecturer and tutor in *Education and Applied Social Studies* at Keele University.



Postgraduate Starting Dates and Induction

Jon Wilson and Mark Butler look into this important area

At present many Universities are in the process of introducing a 2-semester system for taught courses to replace the existing 3-term system. There are several reasons for this, the most notable being that very little lecturing is generally done in the third term due to exams. Semesters allow more time for lecturing. They also allow exams to be taken in the winter as well as the summer, reducing pressure on students and University facilities.

The introduction of semesters has some implications for postgraduate research students. Typically the introduction of semesters has meant that the start date of the Autumn term has had to be brought forward by 2 to 4 weeks. Many research councils only start to pay research studentships from the 1st of October so effectively students cannot register until that date. This contrasts with first degrees or PGCE's, where there is quite often a delay in transfer of funds from LEA's. In these cases, Universities seem to allow a much larger degree of flexibility, allowing students to start their courses if funding is confirmed, even if it has not actually arrived.

If Universities and Students' Unions organise student induction events to coincide with the start of the semester, this can lead to new research students missing out on valuable social and academic induction programmes. In the worst cases students have received little or no information about support services available to them. If they are in University accommodation then they have to pay rent from the start of the undergraduate term, i.e. before they have their grant. Finally some first year students cannot take demonstration jobs within their departments as these jobs start before the 1st of October.

Many postgraduate students suffer from further problems because the Universities assume the majority of postgraduate students will have already studied at the University, when they have not. They provide little or no social and academic induction programmes for new students. Although information is given to students at a University wide level, many faculties and departments do not provide information

for new postgraduates. Furthermore, external graduates have difficulty getting into University accommodation due to places being allocated several months prior to studentships being awarded.

A secondary issue is of research students starting at times other than September/October, which is not unusual. These students not only may not get any formal induction, they also miss the benefits of arriving in their department at the same time as a new cohort of students. Here, semesterisation could actually help, since induction courses could easily be repeated at the start of the second semester.

Induction is an essential for anybody starting a new course, a new job, or entering a new working environment. Increasingly businesses are realising this — people who do not receive induction are inefficient because they must learn everything about their working environment for themselves. So, we need to address two issues: making the Universities and the *Research Councils* consider what can be done about the introduction semesters; and increasing the understanding within Universities of the importance, both social and academic, of induction for new postgraduate students.

The last NPC meeting discussed the issues and agreed to attempt to obtain more data from around the country, to approach the studentship awarding bodies over being more flexible in their start dates for postgraduate students, or even to make available extra money for the preliminary weeks of the semester. One clear message is that induction provision is a good thing all round. The NPC has long intended to produce a set of guidelines on good practice for induction events. This is becoming increasingly important now, especially as the new national *Code of Practice* is likely to make recommendations in this area.

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Mark Butler is President of Liverpool Postgraduate and Mature Students Society.

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Casual visitors, part time students, students who live off-campus and those who are not regularly at their institution will experience some frustration at having to waste precious time loading up the card, just to buy a packet of crisps. As for those who stay for a weekend, if they have not used up all that they have on their card, the question remains how the surplus would be refunded. The University will soon make a fast buck out of conference guests and casual users!

In York, members of the public come and eat and use other services. The University seems unaware, on the other hand, that it may be losing casual sales and alienating itself further from the surrounding community, due to the introduction of *Mondex*, which makes it impossible for them to use university services.



The use of cards, it appears will be compulsory. Ironically, it takes longer to pay for the goods on the card, than with cash! Also, students are distrustful of such technology and there are no receipts or statements produced. At an event last year the mondex system on campus was completely disabled when one cash till was unplugged.

In the light of these concerns, one would hope that the institutions and Midland would have given it more thought and considered students' opinions. They appear to have learnt little from previous experience with the loan scheme, which was a tremendous failure due to lack of consultation.

Margaret Reed is studying for a Masters in Social Work at York.

A Small Question of Pay

Gareth Leyshon, discusses some of the difficulties of teaching as part of a research degree

Postgraduate research students inhabit the murky boundaries between the realm of the student and that of the teacher, enjoying all the benefits of student life (barring the long vacations) but also considered to have sufficient experience to be

receive their stipends to enable them to carry out such research. If the students undertake duties of benefit to the University, such as teaching, then natural justice demands that the University remunerate them accordingly.

substantial teaching or research duties in parallel with research towards a part time PhD.

In some universities, however, it seems that internally-funded students might be expected to undertake research and up to 6 hours' teaching in the week for a stipend equivalent to only the basic research council rate — this is the case in some parts of the Humanities Faculty at Cardiff, and has also been reported by students at Derby and Lancaster. Since standard research stipends are agreed by the Research Councils and the British Academy, and are generally agreed to be the minimum acceptable remuneration for a research student, it is unfair for Universities to expect their students to undertake teaching duties on top of research for the same price. (Bath has a GTA scheme where only the basic research stipend is paid, but for the 4 years which the PhD is expected and permitted to take because of the teaching duties.)

A second problem arises in defining the hours worked, and the appropriate pay level for the form of teaching given - which varies according to the subject taught. Practical sciences require demonstrators who help supervise laboratory classes. More mathematical subjects may require worked examples in exercise classes. Arts and humanities rely more heavily on the well-researched lecture, and students of all disciplines benefit from personal attention in tutorials. Each form of teaching requires some form of preparation to be put in by the teacher in advance of the contact time with students, and there may also be work to be marked afterwards. Preparation and marking time may be paid explicitly, or by allocating a higher

Research Councils are normally used as the benchmark for postgraduate stipends, so Universities offering research postgraduates internal studentships will normally offer stipends at the same rate as the Councils (although not always with the same additional funding available for fieldwork and conference travel). Ideally, the internal student will enjoy the same freedom as the Research Council student, to work up to 6 hours per week on teaching duties and to be paid accordingly. Since the internal student's contract is with the University, however, the University may attempt to impose additional conditions, which may range from the reasonable to the draconian.

The mildest condition which might be imposed is a requirement that the student undertake a given number of paid hours of work in the academic year. The payment might be *pro rata*, as for the Council students, or in the form of a stipend pegged higher than research council rates, in return for a fixed

able to teach undergraduates the knowledge and skills of their discipline. Like more senior members of the academic community, they are caught up in the tension between the demands of teaching and the need to produce results in their research; but unlike staff contracted to undertake both teaching and research, the *raison d'être* of a typical postgraduate research student is to produce a solid piece of research — the dreaded thesis — and preferably within the short time of three years.

Many students, especially in the sciences, are funded by government grants through the various *Research Councils*. The basic stipends are currently around £5,300 p.a. (which is tax-exempt) and the Councils expect that their students will devote their time to research but they permit up to six hours to be devoted for teaching each week. There is a clear contractual arrangement that the Councils are paying the Universities to supervise the student in research towards the attainment of a PhD, and the students

number of hours of teaching. Sometimes such arrangements are called *Graduate Teaching Assistantships* (GTAs), although this should not be confused with *Teaching Assistant* or *Research Assistant* posts where the employee undertakes

hourly rate for the contact time. In the latter case, there may be no record of the true preparation time required, which runs the risk of tracelessly eating into research time for students who have to prepare lecture courses.

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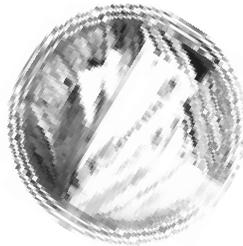
Students on GTA schemes in particular need to be aware of the hours which have been “paid for” by their studentship, and there needs to be a clear understanding with the University about when GTA students can claim *pro rata* payment for teaching undertaken beyond their contracted hours, which is currently an issue of concern to the GTAs at Bath. And at Lancaster, the rule for internal students is only that they should normally work no more than 6 hours per week; a funding crisis there means that in practice many Lancaster postgrads on internal studentships have teaching loads exceeding 6 hours (not counting preparation time) at present.

Another danger for students is that the University might apply pressure on them in various ways. Students whose studentships are funded by their University, subject to annual reviews, might find that their department heaps on them expectations that they will undertake substantial teaching and submit in three years. Payment might be offered for supervising fixed laboratory hours when the time required to complete the laboratory classes (and perhaps mark the undergraduates’ lab books, too) is rather longer. If circumstances demand that a student has to work more than 6 hours in a week, it may be the case that only 6 hours’ payment can be claimed. Or, as at Writtle College in Chelmsford, where students are expected *not* to undertake teaching duties because there are no funds for casual labour, undertaking unpaid work seems to be the only way to gain teaching experience essential for the CV of a future academic.

Issues of casual labour and rights for part-time employees are high on the agenda of the higher education teaching unions at present. The principal unions representing academic and academic-related staff — at least in England and Wales — are the AUT and NATFHE. The AUT tends to have pay negotiating rights in the “old” Universities, while NATFHE holds rights in the “new” sector. Both Unions offer free membership (possibly subject to a local branch fee) to postgraduate students engaged on teaching duties, and are taking part in a joint campaign against the “casualisation” of teaching arrangements.

In the current financial climate, despite the introduction of undergraduate tuition fees, universities have no excess cash with which to be generous. Nevertheless, students too deserve fair pay for a fair hour’s work, and cannot be expected to complete their PhDs on time and spend many hours preparing lectures or marking coursework into the

bargain. It is to be hoped that, in the light of the recent Harris and Dearing reports, that Universities will pay more attention in future to ensuring that postgraduates are properly trained in the art of teaching and are duly accredited. With their teaching skills thus being “professionalised”, postgraduates will be in a stronger position to demand their rights. Meanwhile, with free membership available, perhaps postgraduate students employed on teaching duties should consider joining the most appropriate union, and so add weight to the postgraduate aspect of the current campaign for rights for academic casual labourers.



The last NPC meeting discussed the issues, which have come round before, and on which its current Guidelines on the subject were drawn up, saying in particular:

1. GTA contracts should stipulate the actual *total* number of hours expected, including preparation and marking. If that total exceeds 180 hours per year, the contract should be longer than 3 years,

to allow for the additional research time needed to complete a PhD — ie. it effectively becomes part-time.

2. GTA stipends should ensure that the *take-home* pay for students is at least equivalent to the minimum Research Council rate. Anything less is not a liveable allowance (the RCs believe they pay the minimum needed to live on).
3. GTAs (and, indeed, any university studentship) should include arrangements to ensure that students have opportunities to attend and present their work at conferences, as RC-funded students do. In addition, the NPC will be involved in discussions with the formative *Institute for Learning and Teaching*, to ensure that GTAs are able to enter on the first rung of the ladder of accreditation for university teachers, such as some kind of Associate Member status within the ILT. More information will be forthcoming in due course.

Further information about pay and conditions in particular Universities can be found on the web:

<http://www.cf.ac.uk/uwc/aprs/hotnews/besurv.shtml>

Gareth Leysdon is a third-year astrophysics PhD student at the University of Wales, Cardiff, and is Chair of Cardiff’s Association of Postgraduate Research Students

DOCTOR FUN

<http://sunsite.unc.edu/Dave/drfun.html>



Lee Harvey Bozwald

Equity and Postgraduate Funding

Ruth Chandler explores the issues of access and opportunity in the light of Dearing

In the wake of the Dearing report and responses to it, it seems logical to argue that the financial pressure of increased access to H.E has made the undergraduate grant system an untenable long-term option. However, this basic economic sense should not obscure the ideological shift which underpins this move. Devolution of funding from state support to client borrowing is a shift from an ideology of universal opportunity backed by financial provision to one of universal access to this opportunity. I write the following analysis in light of the discussions we have held at the level of the NPC *Access and Equal Opportunities Sub-Committee*.

The NPC has grave concerns about the potential future of postgraduate study and for an ethical commitment to equality of access to this educational opportunity. Although postgraduate funding has always been difficult, maintenance grants at undergraduate level helped, in theory at least, to alleviate economic obstacles to the First Degree. While never a level playing field, this allowed some disadvantaged students to compete for existing, albeit limited, postgraduate opportunities. A significant omission of the Dearing review into Higher Education was its failure fully to engage with the distinct areas of postgraduate education. This omission is reflected in current debates surrounding the future of H.E.

Nevertheless,

the impact of Dearing and the proposed financial changes at undergraduate level will have direct effects in the postgraduate sector. Particularly, we judge that the increased debt of undergraduate study will discourage entry into postgraduate education; the weight of this burden will be felt most acutely by those starting from the position of least advantage.

postgraduate arena in what we might term a “lifelong” way. For students without the means to finance this stage of academic development, this works by inflating the qualifications necessary to break through the class ceiling while impeding access on economic grounds. Although *Research Councils* are a valued means of supporting postgraduates, high quality

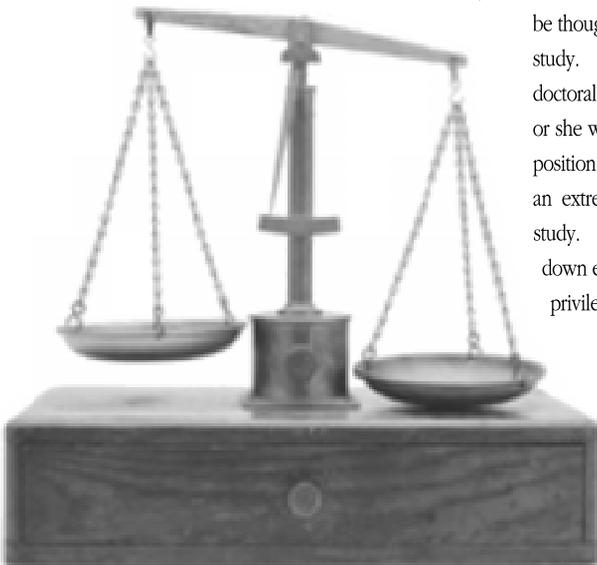
“The intended move from maintenance grants to direct borrowing is symptomatic of the collapse of an entire educational ethos. The system is designed for a far smaller proportion of the population than currently seeks access to it.”

To illustrate the implications for equity, most doctoral opportunities privilege applications which have already completed a taught postgraduate masters course or its equivalent. Although a sensible academic stipulation, this stage of study is usually financed by the student or through a *Career Development Loan* for those unable to fund themselves. The Dearing Report recommends this form of finance as appropriate to postgraduate need, although *Career Development Loans* do not operate on the basis of universal entitlement and are strongly linked specifically to “vocational” training. As a non-income-contingent mode of finance, these may best be thought of as economic deterrents to postgraduate study. If a student is fortunate enough to secure doctoral funding after completing a taught course, he or she would be in the unenviable, if not impossible, position of attempting to make high repayments from an extremely low income for the entire period of study. Consequently, this option works to close down educational opportunity to all except the most privileged groups who would not require the Loan.

applications for these awards far exceed available funds. While university funding mechanisms are another important resource, this means that postgraduates are completely reliant on the good will of the institution concerned. In the absence of an enforceable code of practice as a measure of research strength, these funding arrangements can place the student in an acutely vulnerable position if difficulties arise during the course of study. Consequently, the uneven relationship between current funding mechanisms and high quality human resources places the cost of postgraduate study as a strategic and unregulated currency through which universities negotiate their differences in status. In short, it is through this implicit exchange of human currency that the ability to promote academic excellence is developed. While postgraduates welcome the opportunity to apply for financial support on the basis of specific criteria of awarding bodies, these criteria are not sufficient check against abuses inherent in a system currently regulated by the twin principles of paternalism and prejudice.

While the issue of postgraduate funding continues to remain formally unaddressed by Dearing and the Government, the issues of access and equity are displaced into the

The intended move from maintenance grants to client borrowing is symptomatic of the collapse of an entire educational ethos. The system is designed for a far smaller proportion of the population than currently seeks access to it. Despite the negative



signals sent by the omission of postgraduates from current debates, this move to client-borrowing could indicate an attempt to inflect the ideals of universal access in realistic ways. In particular, the *Teaching and Higher Education Bill* offers valuable opportunities to address the economic obstacles to achievement inherent in a system which can not adequately support its students. However, to make this move coherent within its own terms of reference, the proposed changes to undergraduate funding would need to be extended to include postgraduate education. Currently, this option is not ruled out by the wording of the Bill. Although this move means that postgraduates would emerge with staggering debts, it at least provides a choice to study as a last resort.

If this course is followed, the student loans system would need to be revised to remove the age bar to access at all educational levels. Within the frame of direct finance for the economically disadvantaged, it makes limited sense to say that the state cannot afford to invest in people nearer the end of their working lives. Within the frame of client entitlement to educational borrowing, it makes more sense to say that this system needs, like any bank, to insure for the minority of clients unlikely to repay in full. Given that many reasons for late educational return can be explained by initial lack of opportunity, denying access on the grounds of age only serves to reiterate this cycle of deprivation.

Alternatively, and more desirable as far as social equity is concerned, the government could choose to reconsider its position on means-tested maintenance grants for the poorest undergraduates and make contingent loans an option for postgraduate study. Whichever solution is adopted, it is crucial that postgraduate funding is brought into the equation if the government is sincere about its commitments to equity and lifelong learning. Without proper consideration of the postgraduate dimension, a situation could arise in which enormous social injustices are committed in the name of equity. Whichever path is followed, it is urgent that postgraduates should have a funding mechanism which offers access to all students. In short, a universal choice to study where quality of provision exists in principle and in practice.

Ruth Chandler is the NPC's Access and Equal Opportunities Officer, a new role within the NPC. For more information on this, see last issue, or check out the NPC's web site at www.npc.org.uk

Press Digest: October-December '97

Jamie Darwen furnishes us with our regular round-up of postgraduate issues in the national press

Scientists Face Debt

THES, 17/10/97

Funding changes suggested by the Dearing committee could deter the best graduates from undertaking science PhDs, warns the Royal Society, Britain's academy of science. The society is concerned about the adverse effect tuition fees will have on four-year courses in science and engineering, where students will incur a years extra debt. To stop the best graduates being put off further study, there should be better financial support for post-graduates.

Piling on the Pounds

Guardian Higher, 2/12/97

The spectre of rising debts for undergraduates has added to the mounting pressure on the Government's six research councils to increase grants for PhD students. The Royal Society has warned the Government to address funding problems affecting research, or risk long-term damage to British universities and the economy. Concerns over the quality of students entering postgraduate research have already triggered some research councils into action. The BBSRC (funding biology) aims to increase its funding for postgraduates after it found that fewer students with first-class degrees were taking PhDs.

The Dearing report paid little attention to the future of PhD training. Yet, ironically, Dearing could have profound effects on the support of postgraduates by the research councils. If the councils are forced to pay the full overhead costs of research projects they support, the number of PhD studentships could fall dramatically. Also, the introduction of tuition fees for undergraduates could significantly affect demand for postgraduate study.

Deposits Plan for Next RAE

THES, 14/11/97

The government's chief scientific adviser, Sir Robert May, has called for research and postgraduate provision to be concentrated in fewer departments, and for new universities to abandon any plans to become major research centres. His comments came at the same time as HEFCE unveiled proposals for institutions to pay a deposit for each submission to the next *Research Assessment Exercise*.

Universities could be asked to make a down-payment along with a forecast on what RAE rating they think a department should achieve. The money would be

returned if the department achieved or exceeded the rating. This would discourage departments from entering the RAE simply because they have nothing to lose.

Training Wanted

THES, 14/11/97

Postgraduate research students want mandatory training in research methods, a new study by *Heist* (the education marketing and research agency) has found. Only half of PhD students are given research methods training, according to the survey, but the vast majority agreed that training should be a compulsory part of all research programmes. PhD students with lecturing responsibilities also wanted compulsory teacher training. Half of respondents had teaching duties, but only a handful had been given any training.



Postgraduate Private Loans Scheme Falter

Martin Gough presents an update on the '94 Group loans scheme

For more than the last year, the NPC has been in correspondence with the Midland Bank concerning its loan scheme for postgraduates promoted specifically at the select '94 Group of Universities. *Newsletter* reported the progress in helping the Bank to understand and to prepare itself for the needs of postgraduates (take a look at the NPC web site, www.npc.org.uk, for the background story of this). The scheme became available from the start of this academic year — and it has *not* been successful.

Essentially the level of interest amongst postgraduates has been too low and, amongst those applying for a loan, the rejection rate by the Bank is around one in three. The business has not been covering its costs and the level of rejections was too high both for the Bank's image and for the likings of the Universities promoting it to their postgraduate course applicants. The main reason for rejection was that the Bank did not believe that they would get repaid. The NPC had predicted that the expectations of postgraduates would be raised too high by the publicity of the scheme produced last year, and this has turned out true, particularly for international students.

A general problem has been inconsistency overall. The Bank complained that the Universities, supposedly acting as a group, had really acted in

different manners as regards publicity. In addition the responsibility for each loan application rests with the individual branches local to the Universities.

The scheme anyway had basically the same conditions as Midland's existing *Professional Studies Loans*, available only to certain vocational course students around the country. Although unwilling to date to provide a written statement of both the failure of the pilot scheme or of revised current policy, the Bank is willing to consider enhancing this to make it available to more postgraduates who would not be bad risks commercially in the long run, as conveyed verbally by a spokesperson from a Head Office in London. The NPC has maintained that it is willing to provide useful advice about postgraduate needs, and this was recognized by the spokesperson, although they have so far not taken up the offer to hold a meeting this year.

The NPC discussed the whole issue of loans and funding at its meeting of 13th December at Nottingham Trent University. We see that one problem is that interpretation of Midland Bank's policy is very much up to individual branches, exacerbated now that the Bank as a whole does not wish to have a continuing contractual relationship with the '94 Group. The NPC recommends ensuring

some national consistency. This would mean for commercial schemes banks directing their branches to work more closely with HEIs, and not just the '94 Group, with maximum information for postgraduates as a basis.

Such schemes will enable some individuals to study for a postgraduate qualification who would not otherwise be able to. Separately, the NPC is pressing for for a national, publicly-available loans scheme, with preferential interest rates, at least for those who need to fund themselves, to fit in with the new funding arrangements for undergraduates. The legislation currently going through Parliament does not provide for this, although it could in principle.

The *DfEE Progress Report* issued this month also conveys: "The Government is considering the Dearing Committee's recommendation that Disabled Students Allowances should be extended to part-time students and postgraduates," and, "Next year the funding available for Access Funds will be doubled and eligibility will be extended to part-time students".

The NPC has expressed its views to the Minister of State. Separately, student bodies are organising a lobby of Parliament on 25th February — details are available from Sophie Bolt on 0181-692-1406.

Contacting the NPC

The NPC's General Secretary, Martin Gough, is always at hand to answer any queries you might have about the NPC or any of our activities, or to discuss any of the issues the NPC is dealing with.

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You can also contact us directly (and, if you prefer, anonymously) through our web site, which also features background information on the NPC, our events and publications, together with an extensive on-line version of *Newsletter*, and the opportunity to automatically subscribe to the NPC's email mailing lists. Just fire-up any web browser and visit <http://www.npc.org.uk/>