

# Edinburgh Conference Reforms NPC

**Andrew Green** reviews the recent NPC Conference, held in Edinburgh

My first NPC Conference, I have to say, was a complete delight. Subtitled *Postgraduate Futures*, the Conference was skilfully pulled back from the brink of disaster over the summer by the last-minute hire of Jeremy Hoad to host the Conference in last year's location of Edinburgh Pollock Halls.

As with previous Conferences, the sessions took place more-or-less in two concurrent streams, and featured topics ranging from *Complaints and Codes of Practise*, to *International Students' Issues*, to a review of the preliminary results of the NPC's survey into Postgraduate Associations, to the development of the NPC's new web site. Unusually for most similar organisations, the NPC's conference sessions don't actually serve to set down policy on any issue, but instead form a useful opportunity to lay down the groundwork discussion for such policy decisions, and to enable an opportunity for delegates to tap into experiences across the country, providing a rich source of ideas that can be taken back to individual associations.

However, the Conference also traditionally sees the NPC's *Annual General Meeting*, which for scheduling reasons had to be held well prior to the Conference this year — an *Emergency General Meeting* had been called for the Conference instead, to elect representatives to the NPC's various formal positions.

Before this could happen, though, we needed to settle upon the results of the NPC's Strategy Review. The Constitutional and structural changes to the NPC brought about by this Review are assessed on page three — but clearly, these changes had a certain impact on the positions that were “up for grabs” at the Conference itself. The hurried scheduling of the Conference had meant that fewer than usual delegates had registered — but a great many of the key positions in the NPC were filled nevertheless. A complete list is available at the NPC's new web site, but it's worth mentioning here that the Conference saw the departure from NPC business (at least, officially) of two stalwarts: Jamie Darwen and Crispin Allard. Bye, lads.

We also finalised the NPC's response to the Dearing Report at the Conference — which you

can read in full in the centre pages of this issue of the *Newsletter* — and had the opportunity to grill (and lightly baste?) two members of the *Research Councils* — Lindsay Fidler and Gordon Young — on funding issues, together with a presentation from Robin Jackson of the HEQC on the transformation of the HEQC into the new *Quality Assurance Agency*. The traditional panel discussion with members of various political parties had to be cancelled due to the singularly inconsiderate scheduling of the Referendum on Scottish devolution taking place the very day we were all due to arrive at the Conference!

The social aspect to the Conference was as full as usual, with the NPC's *Annual Dinner* (to which all delegates are very welcome) taking place in the bewilderingly-grand-for-a-Union-building Teviot Row Union, and an excursion to the Edinburgh Grassmarket, which got surreptitiously waylaid by a variety of pubs *en route*. The atmosphere at these meetings is overwhelmingly welcoming, which is a great credit to the NPC as an organisation.

So if you didn't come to the Conference this time, make sure you do next year, OK?

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## Comment

**Ruth Chandler** writes about the trials of setting up a Postgrad Association

I remember the almost evangelical moment when I first heard the 'good news' of a Postgraduate Society in my Institute. I had been alone in the wilderness of my research for three long months; a society where I could meet others in a similar situation seemed like the answer to my prayers. The flyer looked promising: *What does a Postgraduate Society Mean to You?* Off I went, full of expectation, to discover this magical 'community' of like-minded souls.

Of course, this was all hopelessly idealistic. I arrived to find a struggling S.U. representative desperate to find some commonality amongst a group so diverse half of its members would not have said hello over coffee. The social mix was clearly rigidly divided along full-time/part-time, age, ethnicity and gender lines which was further extenuated within disciplinary boundaries. People sat in little clusters radiating 'go away' signals to other groups and, on top of this, most were so pushed for time in their daily lives that resentment at this apparently 'useless' meeting emanated like a black cloud of annoyance. There were, however, enough people there to form a viable society structure and, perhaps prematurely, the rep managed to encourage some students to form a steering group to help this 'community' materialise. For the most part, everyone went home not entirely sure why they had come but, I think, with some sense that there were other people around — most importantly, that there could be a legitimate forum where their needs could be aired.

Despite the disillusionment, I gained a lot from that initial meeting. The rep had taken great pains to inform us that the biggest reasons for postgraduate drop-out was social isolation combined with financial hardship. She had flagged up the need for postgraduates to be involved in representational structures and had promised to feed their diversity of need into the wider S.U. remit within the Institute. However, the biggest problem was the sheer difficulty of finding a means of bringing such a widely diverse group together to articulate its needs, in a way that did not seem like a waste of time to most of its already hard-pushed members. The improbability of finding a social function with broad appeal loomed large. And, as the icing on the cake, all the new volunteers went ex-directory at a rate that closely resembled the land-speed record.

Then Enlightenment occurred, and the *'Answer-That-Had-Simply-Been-There-All-The-Time'*, stepped out and made itself known. We would offer the group 'useful' generic skill-based events with a long lunch built in. We would supply a creche for those with non-negotiable child commitments and hold these events as a Saturday day school to cater for the diversity of work-commitment. It worked for our postgraduate mix. Approximately half of the postgraduate body attended but, importantly, those that couldn't sent requests for information in the future. Because of the crossover between social and academic functions it became possible to secure joint funding between the S.U. and our *Postgraduate Office* — a link that can now be developed to more adequately feed student needs into academic and social representational structures. A new *Thesis Desk* is being planned as a direct result of these efforts. The best result, as far as we are concerned, is that other people have come forward with suggestions for events that they would like to help organise. We don't yet have a fully fledged Postgraduate Society but perhaps this year...

# The NPC's New General Secretary

**Martin Gough** gives us his autobiography (in two versions)

.....*Official Version*

**Name:** A.M.Gough

**Age:** 30-ish

**Height:** 5ft 8 inches

**Weight:** 10st 7lb

**Years in Academia:** 13 — following a Maths/Science school background, B.Soc.Sc. in Philosophy & Political Science (1987, University of Birmingham), Master of Arts (by research) in Philosophy (1988, University of Leeds), Doctor of Philosophy on Philosophy of The Self (1997, University of Leeds); 1991-97, teaching Philosophy at all Levels, for Leeds, Nottingham and the Open Universities mainly; Associate Editor for journal *The Philosopher*.

**Years in Postgraduate Education:** 10 ("including timely completion of Ph.D.")

**Years in Postgraduate Education politics:** 10

**Years involved with NPC:** "I believe that we need a new face for this new dawn for postgraduate people in this country, a new person for a new age, new NPC, ..."

**Occupation since 1st**

**October:** NPC General Secretary

**Business interests:** NPC

**Leisure interests (awake):** NPC

**Content of Dreams:** NPC

**Aspirations:** "I will not rest until everybody *loves* the NPC."

.....*Unofficial Version*

**Name:** Martin Gough

**Age, Weight, etc:** ...hmm.

**Years in Postgraduate Education:** well, I was doing my Ph.D. part-time after transferring from another institution (Cambridge University) where I fell out academically with my supervisor during two years of State Studentship funded full-time research (which in principle in its own right led to nothing).

**Years involved on national scene:** 1990 co-host for National Conference (Cambridge), 1991-93 Research Coun-cils Liaison Officer, 1993-96 on the Financial side, 1994 organised *Postgraduates & Teaching in University* workshop (Leeds), 1996-97 Minutes Sec. "...I did not hear anyone say too many years!"

**Impression of current occupation:** "It is great to be employed properly fully for the first time for a while, and yet at the same time practically speaking to continue (following the regime of studies) to be your own boss from day to day. Could the NPC turn out to be the model 'flexible working' organisation?"

**Leisure interests:** playing soccer, cricket, bass guitar; getting out to restaurants, to see the Arts/culture, and for the odd ramble; writing "...On my favourite school report, the Head alleged that my contributions to the school magazine were 'peevish and irritable', I hope no-one has found that my NPC Newsletter sketches have similar qualities!"

**Aspirations:** "On behalf of the NPC this year, seri-

ously, I must achieve a broader interest around HE, both amongst student unions and professional/academic bodies. I am not planning to leave HE as a preference in the long term but, to make most use of my training to date, I ought to be appointed a Lecturer in Philosophy before too long."



# Looking to the Future: A New Structure for the NPC

**Jamie Darwen** reveals the details of the NPC's reformed Constitution

For the last year and a half the NPC has been carrying out a strategy review, to consider how the committee needs to change in order to continue expanding its membership and range of activities over the next few years. The NPC has grown enormously since the creation of the sabbatical General Secretary position in 1992, and it had become clear that the existing structure was being stretched to the limit.

The recommendations of the review group were agreed at the Conference in Edinburgh. The goal for the medium term, as soon as finances allow, is to employ a second sabbatical officer. In the meantime, the NPC will pay more part-time assistants, along the lines of the *Publications Assistant* (who has edited the *Newsletter* and web site for the last year), to provide support for the General Secretary. The review group also suggested changes to the structure of the committee, which should allow the NPC to be more responsive to its affiliates, and more effective in its activities and involvement of delegates. The main changes which will take place are described below.

## **Executive Officers**

The NPC will continue to be headed by a "tripartite leadership" consisting of the *General Secretary*, *Treasurer* and *Chair*. This structure was devised to ensure that no one person can assume too much power, and has been seen to be very successful. The *General Secretary* is the executive and administrative head of the committee, and is responsible for implementing committee policy. The *Treasurer* is the financial head, with control over the committee's finances. The *Chair* is the constitutional head, who chairs meetings and rules on the interpretation of policy.

The next five positions cover the different functions of the NPC's activities. The *Academic Secretary* coordinates academic campaigns, such as the NPC's series of guidelines for good practice. The *Conference Secretary* will organise the annual conference, and any other conferences or seminars. The *Equal Opportunities Officer* oversees policies on

equal opportunities and access for postgraduates in higher education, and is responsible for ensuring that the committee provides an environment which encourages and enables anyone to participate fully. The *Communications Officer* will develop the NPC's strategy for communicating with its members, and the *Development Officer* will look at ways to increase the membership and range of activities of the committee.

Other officers will work on specific projects or issues. Two of these are permanent positions, covering areas which the committee has identified as being of particular importance: *International Students* and the development of *Postgraduate Associations*. In addition, four *Project Officers* will work on remits that they identify for themselves (with the agreement of the committee). The *Mature Student Union Liaison Officer* is nominated by the MSU to provide a link with the NPC. Finally, two *Ordinary Executive Officers* have no portfolio and will watch over the rest (don't mention Peter Mandelson!).

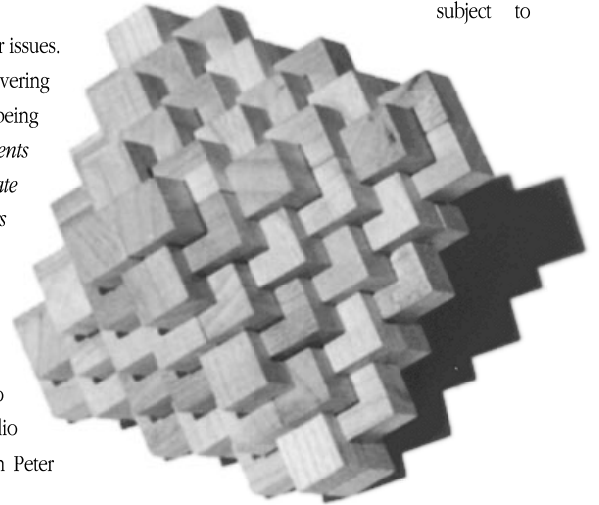
## **Structure of Committee Meetings**

The other main change resulting from the review will be to the way the NPC holds its meetings. Many people have felt that the traditional Saturday afternoon meetings, while being successful at creating constructive policy, don't make best use of the limited opportunities to get people together. The review concluded that the committee should hold a number of weekend long meetings. This would provide the opportunity to include training and briefing sessions for delegates, and time to start planning actions resulting from policy which is decided. This should ensure that delegates are better informed about the issues being discussed, so they can participate more in the meetings, and get more involved in the committee's activities.

If meetings are longer they will probably have to be less frequent, as committee members may not have

the time to devote a whole weekend every two months. There is a danger, though, that longer gaps between meetings could leave the NPC in a "policy vacuum", unable to respond to consultations. Therefore, a new *Management Subcommittee* will be given limited policy-making powers, to enable the committee to function properly between meetings.

Any policy so decided will be subject to



ratification by the next full NPC meeting. The time between meetings will also be used to develop regional activities, and the NPC will be supporting more regional meetings and events.

## **The Future**

These changes are, of course, only the start. Clare Mortimer and Ewan Gillon (the newly elected *Development* and *Communications Officers*) will be monitoring how well they are working, and looking at what else needs to be done to achieve the goal of a second sabbatical. The NPC has achieved a lot for postgraduates over the last five years, and we believe it is now in a position to continue doing this for the next five years at least.

[The new NPC constitution will be available soon on the NPC's web site, or can be obtained from the General Secretary.]

# The NPC's Response to the Dearing Review

**John Gray** unveils the official response from the NPC to the report of the *National Committee of Inquiry into Higher Education*

The *National Postgraduate Committee* welcomes the opportunity to respond to the *Report of the NCIHE*. As the representative body for postgraduate students studying in the UK, we would like to respond particularly on those issues that affect postgraduate students.

Postgraduate students constitute a fifth of HE students, but the NCIHE has given little consideration to the impact of its proposals on postgraduate education. As a consequence, we believe that there is much scope for further consultation on several of these issues. Postgraduate students form a vital part of the UK's research base and are also the next generation of academics.

## **Recommendations 14 and 15: The Institute of Learning & Teaching**

The NPC supports the establishment of the Institute as a means of improving the quality of teaching in higher education. We hope that the Institute will recognise that:

- Teaching by postgraduate students is a significant part of teaching in higher education, and may be a first step in a teaching career for many students. The Institute should work to support postgraduate students who teach.
- For students performing research projects (whether at doctoral or Masters level) the quality of research supervision they receive is essential to the successful completion of their studies. The Institute should include postgraduate supervision as part of the training and accreditation process for all academic staff who supervise research students. We refer you to the HEQC's *Research Degree Guidelines* which recommend that institutions should ensure that staff involved with supervisory duties are provided with appropriate training.

## **Recommendation 24: Codes of Practice**

We strongly support the introduction of codes of practice, provided that they are sufficiently strict and well-enforced. In terms of postgraduate research students, we support the work already performed by the HEQC on its *Research Degree Guidelines*. We also produce relevant guidelines booklets, and I enclose copies of these.

## **DEARING**

A code of practice, however, only specifies minimum standards, and does not in itself encourage good practice. In order to address this, we believe that the requirements of the *Codes of Practice* be revised upwards regularly in order to produce a continuous increase in the quality of the baseline. Obviously initiatives which encourage good practice should continue to be supported.

## **Recommendation 25: National pool of external examiners**

While we support the general principle behind the establishment of a national pool of accredited external examiners, this may have complications for research degree examinations which will need to be addressed. Research degree examination requires that the examiner be an expert in their field, and it is possible that a limited pool of external examiners could not provide a suitable candidate.

Training as an external examiner of research degrees could usefully be included in modules on research supervision provided by the *Institute of Learning and Teaching*.

## **Recommendation 26: QAA Board**

We strongly support the recommendation that the board of the QAA should include a student and an international member. We have already made our views on this clear to the QAA, and have been rebuffed. We have had a good working relationship with the HEQC for several years, and would be very keen to enter into dialogue with the QAA as to how such a student member should be appointed, and what the role of that member would be.

## **Recommendation 29: Arts & Humanities Research Council**

We strongly support the establishment of an *Arts and Humanities Research Council* as a means of improving access to postgraduate study and research in the humanities and arts provided that the new council receives the additional funding recommended in the report to support grants and studentships.

## **Recommendation 31: Research Training**

We believe that the majority of research students welcome opportunities to receive training in professional skills as part of their research training. We commend, in particular, the CRAC 'Graduate Schools', and believe that more students should be given the chance to participate in these.

However, it needs to be recognised that an increased emphasis on structured training as part of a research degree will significantly change the nature of the degree. Many students are concerned that they will have less time to carry out research; this means that either completion times for research theses will increase, or expectations of the content of theses will have to be lowered.

## **Structure of Postgraduate Degrees (paras 11.88 - 11.90)**

We support work currently being carried out to produce a typology and new framework for postgraduate programmes.

We accept the need to strengthen the status of the MPhil. However, for students who fail a PhD, the MPhil is not a "consolation prize". Students who are awarded an MPhil in such circumstances should have met all the requirements for an MPhil, and so it is fair that they are awarded that degree.

## **Recommendation 34: Research funding**

We are concerned about the impact of the revised research funding proposals. The removal of support from departments with low RAE ratings will reduce access to postgraduate research within those departments.

We do not believe that the RAE is a suitable measure for the allocation of support for postgraduate students; there are many departments with low ratings which provide a good environment for postgraduate research. Conversely, there are departments with high ratings which do not provide adequate support for postgraduates. The RAE is a blunt measure of research output and gives no indication of the quality of facilities and support for researchers.

We believe that funding for postgraduates should be allocated primarily on an assessment of the quality of the student experience within a department. Compliance with a suitable code of practice would be a prerequisite for funding.

We are also concerned about the effect on postgraduate research of departments opting out of the RAE. Research students in such departments may be concerned about the value of their degrees and the perception that they have come from a "second-class" research department.

## **Chapter 20: The funding of student maintenance**

We are very disappointed that the NCIHE has not considered the maintenance of postgraduate students. The HEFCE/CVCP/SCOP *Review of Postgraduate*

*Education* recommended that the NCIHE consider this issue as it was outside the scope of their inquiries. As a consequence, there are no substantial recommendations on which to base a response.

The NPC, in our submission to the NCIHE's consultation, raised two issues which the report fails to address adequately (paras 20.13 - 20.14).

### **1. Extension of maintenance support for postgraduate study**

Paragraph 20.13 argues that there is no need to extend maintenance support for postgraduates, as the *Career Development Loan* scheme meets this need. CDLs are only available to students on certain vocational courses. Some other commercial loan schemes exist, but most postgraduates will not be able to get help from any of these.

The majority of postgraduates pay their own fees, and receive no grant or any source of funding. These students make considerable financial sacrifices to



study, and endure considerable hardship during their courses. Access to a student loan, with a flexible and fair repayment system, would do much to ease the burden on these students.

We believe, therefore, that the income-contingent loans scheme which is to be introduced for undergraduates should be available to *all* postgraduate students, though the Government should ensure that:

- The number of studentships awarded by the Research Councils, and their value, should be at least maintained.
- Institutions do not charge higher or differential fees as a consequence of an extension of the loans system.

### **2. The impact of funding arrangements on access.**

We are disappointed that the NCIHE has not considered the effect of the proposed funding mechanism on access to postgraduate education. It is important that the uptake of postgraduate education is not reduced by funding pressures.

The NPC's submission argued that a large debt resulting from undergraduate study could discourage students from further postgraduate study. The report dismisses this argument, but misses the point somewhat.

The concern is not about students having to pay off a loan while they are postgraduates, as a repayment system with a reasonable threshold before repayments are required will address this. The problem is the accumulated debt after six or seven years of study, which will be prohibitive to many people. A student graduating with a £10,000 debt, and faced with paying their own fees for postgraduate study, would be likely to at least double that debt.

Furthermore, a debt carried on from an undergraduate degree would be likely to prejudice chances of getting a professional studies loan or *Career Development Loan* for postgraduate study.

While we realise that the Government has made separate proposals on undergraduate funding to those contained in the NCIHE report, the following comments apply equally to the original proposals of the Committee and those announced by the Government.

- We oppose the introduction of tuition fees for undergraduate students. This is a disincentive to entry into higher education and has a consequent impact on access to postgraduate education.
- We believe that steps should be taken to ensure that graduates are not discouraged from undertaking postgraduate education by debts accrued during undergraduate study. The Government should consequently consider schemes to encourage the uptake of postgraduate education, and to mitigate financial disincentives to participation. We are happy to consult with the Government on the nature of such schemes.

In summary, we feel that the report of the NCIHE has not fully considered the position of postgraduate education in its work. It has not resolved the issue of improving funding for postgraduate study and research, nor has it addressed the implications for access of the proposals made for undergraduate funding. While we have outlined some suggestions for making good this deficit, we would be keen to meet with representatives of Government to discuss these suggestions in more detail in order to remedy these deficiencies.

## Save Our Wardens!

**Richard Race** talks about the Warden/Tutor system...

In the post-Dearing era with the debate in Higher Education revolving around university expenditure budgets and top-up fees, this article aims to remind you of an often-neglected but significant part of university life — warden/tutor systems.

The benefits of being within a warden/tutor system revolve around financial and supportive issues. As an ex-*Assistant Warden* here at Keele we were offered a package which included: rent-free accommodation in apartments on campus; the majority of our bills were payed by the university and we were given a social allowance each semester.

But just as importantly, the warden/tutor system provides one of the few opportunities for postgraduate students to come together and feel part of a postgraduate community. Other than the *Keele Research Association* (KRA) which is essentially a bar, Keele, like many other universities provides little if any pastoral support for postgraduate students. What many domestic, let alone international students, feel about this situation isn't difficult to work out. We have all heard stories of postgraduate students who have felt alienated by universities who offer little in the way of support. This, I believe explains the development in British Universities of student support bodies such as the various Postgraduate Associations.

Warden/Tutor systems should be saved and preserved because: firstly, warden/tutor systems save universities money. Warden/tutors do full-time unpaid jobs. How many people would a university be able to find who would be prepared to get out of bed at 3am on a duty night, confront a drunk or stoned student and politely ask him or her to turn the music down because it can be heard in Australia? Secondly, warden/tutor systems offer financial and supportive benefits which are important in getting postgraduate students through the research process; thirdly and significantly, the system provides a pastoral service for undergraduate students. We can all remember leaving home for the first time at eighteen or nineteen.

The cuts within Higher Education have, not surprisingly, led to a review and a reduction in the number of wardens here at Keele this year. We have witnessed the demise of the *Dean of Students Office*, along with that of four wardens. The pressure and responsibility placed on the shoulders of the new Resident Manager and the remaining Resident Tutors has increased. Hopefully, for all concerned, the future will not see more cuts and a reduction in the number of tutors here at Keele and elsewhere.

# One of the Quietest AGMs in Living Memory

**Martin Gough** reports on the NPC's recent AGM

The *Annual General Meeting* of most organisations is meant to be one of the main focuses, the best attended meeting of the year. At 11am on the day (26th July) only three of us were present. This was not cause for concern for the AGM proper, which was not due to start until 2pm. It may also have been something to with the fact that it was the scintillating Financial Sub-Committee which was due to meet so early! Even so, we had to wait a while for the required fourth person to appear.

As we chosen few got going on this, we gradually woke up to savour the surroundings, not a smoke-filled room as such but a room pervaded by the vinegary aroma of the previous night's spillages, the venue serving as one of the bars in Warwick University Students' Union, which turns into a concrete bunker shaped nightclub as darkness falls. It was indeed a Remembrance of Times Past, namely the venue of the 1993 NPC Conference. We were in a different room, carpeted rather than sticky plastic floor, but enjoying similarly sticky tables. Quite why toys, drawings and paint pots were stacked up in one corner was a puzzlement: Jamie Darwen, our host, claimed they were for the Summer Playscheme, but who knows?

Normally the AGM is scheduled as part of the annual Conference, but this time the Conference was to be in September, the main reason for expected low attendance. With this in mind we organised a couple of Conference-style discussion sessions, one either side of the AGM proper. A few more drifted in and we got going on the first soon after midday, Jamie and John Gray reporting back from the grand opening/slightly damp squib event for the publication of the Dearing report just a couple of days before.

Perhaps such extras ensured that, when the AGM was due to begin, the gathering was comfortably exactly quorate, and not even including those who had apparently better things to do, such as our illustrious "Loans Dude", who was caught up in the fictional reality of a film set (will Bill Hanage remember his NPC buddies who launched his career when he is famous? we ask), and those who had worked

themselves into the ground for the NPC such as our heroic but at the time hospitalised stand-in Conference Organiser, Jeremy Hoad, for whom we signed a huge *Get Well* card.

The proceedings were packed with incident, to the envy of all who were absent, I am sure, the meeting deciding to elect next year's General Secretary (whose name I cannot quite remember), with a pretty close vote in an exciting two-way contest following a seemingly endless succession of interrogatory questions, but to postpone the other posts until the Conference time. The Budget report was also sparking with controversy, and our Information Assistant outlined his plans for the technology to take the NPC into the next Millenium.

Jamie Darwen, John Gray and Crispin Allard led the discussion session, some time after 5pm, on the *Strategy Review Group*. The last meeting requested that a diagram signifying the proposed new structure of the relation between posts, bodies, employees, concepts, and other ontological entities be presented to aid thought about it. Only one printed copy was available and so Jamie's fair artistic hand was set to work with a marker pen translating it on to the Playscheme flipchart.

The proposed "Equal Opportunities Officer" has raised controversy largely to to its ambiguous nomenclature. Would "Access Officer" be better? How about "Equal Opportunities and Access Officer" as a succinct compromise? Offers for a dynamic name are still welcomed! Generally, however, the proposals for change, including the dividing up of responsibilities of different Officers, met with approval, presumably signalling an easy passage for the specific constitutional changes at the proposed EGM actually during the Conference to come.

Other matters were discussed including permanent NPC contact details, such as a 'phone no., which could be rung for the latest information ("Welcome to NPC: press 1 for the contact details of the NPC, press 2 for the latest news and gossip, press 3 for the current General Secretary's vital statistics, ....")

# Press Digest – August-September 1997

Our regular round-up of postgraduate issues in the national press

## ***Not Making it Easier for Mums - or Dads***

THES, 1/8/97

Jenny Gristock, a research student at the University of Sussex, asks if the needs of students with children are being ignored. Last October, the Research Councils scrapped the postgraduate dependents' allowance, replacing it with a lesser allowance available only to lone parents. This has caused considerable problems for students whose partners have little or no income. Dearing concluded that problems over childcare contribute to the high drop-out rates of female mature and part-time students. This could explain why only 35% of postgraduate research students are women.

## ***Sir Ron's Forgotten Legion***

THES Research Opportunities, 5/9/97

An article by the NPC's Ewan Gillon, also a member of the working group on research for the *Dearing Inquiry*. Ewan argues that the Dearing report fails to

consider the place of postgraduate study within higher education. In recent years, postgraduate education has expanded hugely, but the report fails to consider the implications of its funding proposals for this increasingly large population.

Students may complete undergraduate courses with debts of £10,000. For those who continue with three or four years of postgraduate study, the accumulated debt could be similar to a mortgage. This could hit, in particular, demand for arts and humanities courses with considerable cultural, but little economic, worth. Many students who cannot get funding for such courses will not be able to justify running up huge debts knowing that their earning potential is modest.

## ***Brilliance and the Barrier to a Great Career***

THES Research Opportunities, 5/9/97

Final year research students need specialist careers advice, but there is little available. Pitfalls of academic life include low pay, short contracts, and

the tension between teaching and research. In July, an *Implementation Group* was set up to work on the *Concordat* for research staff, agreed last year by the CVCP and the major research funding bodies. The Concordat recognises the insecurities associated with short-term contracts, and that to improve the situation will require more active personnel and career management of contract researchers.

## ***Debt-bit Postgrads Seek Golden Hellos***

THES, 19/9/97

This report on the *NPC Conference* in Edinburgh highlights the NPC's response to the Dearing report. Postgraduates want institutions or research councils to offer "golden hellos" to stop students abandoning academic study because of high debts. Delegates also called for income-contingent loans to be extended to postgraduates. Most delegates said they were prepared to run up debts so long as everyone had access to a loan scheme, and so long as they retained the academic freedom to take the PhD of their choice.

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## **SRHE Guides**

The *Postgraduate Issues Network* of the SRHE is a national one for anyone who has a supervisory or management interest in the welfare of postgraduate students -mainly, but not entirely academics. John Gray (NPC Chair) has a place on the Editorial Board for the Guides that the network is producing (for supervisors, managers and teachers of postgrads). Many of you have known for some time that the *Times Higher Educational Supplement* was to sponsor these SRHE Guides for supervisors. I am pleased to be able to tell you that the agreement is now that THES will be publishing them jointly with SRHE. THES has gone public on this (see THES, Oct 3 1997 p vii, red box), and higher profile publicity will follow.

The first batch of Guides has taken rather longer to come out than I had hoped. This was due firstly to the peer reviewing, which I am sure you agree is nonetheless an essential part of the scheme, and secondly to working out of details with THES, which again I am sure you will agree, has resulted in a most worthwhile development.

### **SRHE contact:**

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## **Publish and be Damned!**

The *Keele Postgraduate Education Discussion Group* announce their next Conference, *Publish and be Damned!*



The conference will be held at Keele University on 15th November 1997.

For more details or a programme of the conference, please email both Barbara Cole ([edd00@keele.ac.uk](mailto:edd00@keele.ac.uk)) and Richard Race ([edd45@keele.ac.uk](mailto:edd45@keele.ac.uk)). Attendance costs £10.

## The Postgraduate Hub

# www.npc.org.uk

The NPC's site on the Internet has just undergone a major re-launch, and can now be found at our own domain: <http://www.npc.org.uk/>

The site features information on all aspects of the NPC, together with the on-line version of the *Newsletter*, containing background details of all the issues we've covered here, as well as a great many others. You can also contact the NPC directly through the site, as well as being able to subscribe to the NPC's email mailing lists, link to any of the many Postgraduate Associations across the country (together with other Internet resources useful to postgraduates), check out the records of the NPC's previous *Conferences*, and browse through our *Guidelines* series.

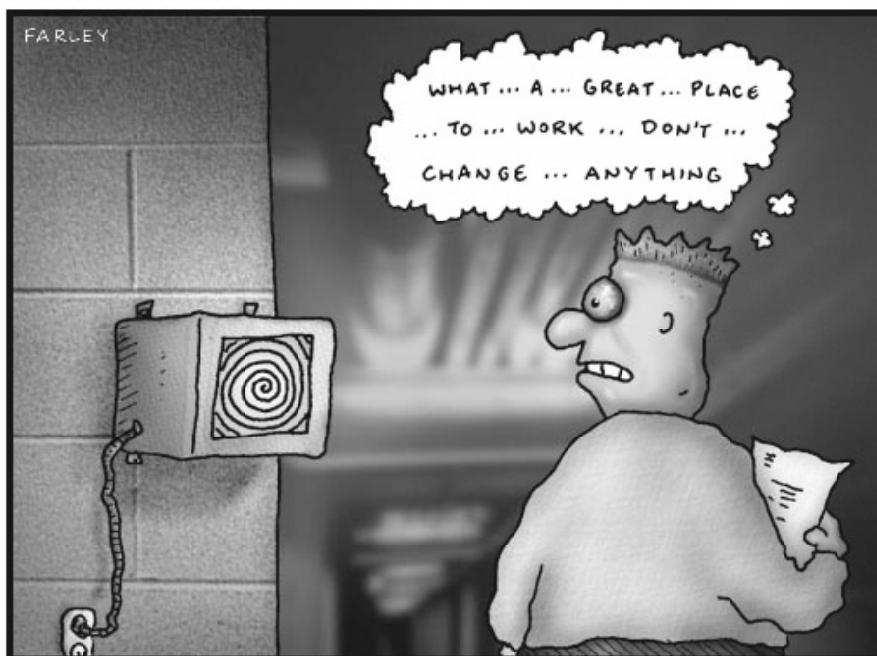
Very soon, we will be launching a very special series of Web-based services to our affiliates, including the opportunity to register your own research interests with the site, allowing you to contact other researchers around the country who are working on similar research programmes.

Check out the next issue of the *Newsletter* for more details on this and other services in the pipeline...

We aim to make the site the definitive Postgraduate Hub of the Net. Stop by soon!

### DOCTOR FUN

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



Subliminal suggestion box.

### Contacting the NPC

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

You can reach him at:

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General Secretary  
National Postgraduate Committee  
c/o Leeds University Union  
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