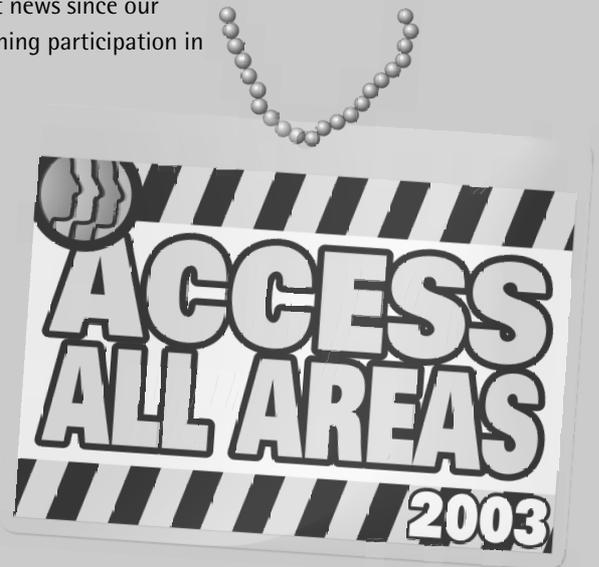


Welcome to the special conference edition of pn to update you on the latest news since our Ordinary General Meeting in Essex. Conference this year is focusing on widening participation in postgraduate education. Much of this will be addressed at our speaker sessions on Thursday 14th, where a number of speakers will be informing us of their perspective. Further to this on Saturday 16th there will be our Annual General Meeting (AGM). At the meeting a motion has been tabled discussing the government's 50% expansion target and how this will affect postgraduate education in the future. This was discussed informally at the last OGM and it was considered an important issue for postgraduates, which NPC needs to form policy on.

There are a number of other items on the agenda for the AGM including a motion on international student visa charges, another round of ongoing changes to the by-laws to make them compatible with our new constitution and also approval of guidelines on postgraduate provision that have been drafted recently. Last but not least there will also be the elections of the 2003/04 executive. This will include election of the 2003/04 General Secretary, which is the only postgraduate national sabbatical position in existence in the UK. There may well be a number of positions contested, which will make the AGM ever more important for delegates to attend and cast their vote.

We are grateful to UK GRAD for sponsoring this conference newsletter. Please do encourage postgraduates in your institution to attend the course as we highly recommend it to any postgraduate.



Writing Up on the Dole

Jim Ewing, NPC Scotland vice chair tells us about writing up students' financial struggles.

Research is work. Non-remunerative, but still work. The researcher attempts something new, or at least to clear the ground for what follows, with benefits often intangible and frequently non-quantifiable, yet incontrovertibly real.

Writing-up research students can claim Jobseeker's Allowance once no longer under tuition and available for work; a cushy six-months, it may seem, but insufficient for many who have to sacrifice valuable research time for extra income - only to find their Jobseeker's Allowance cut.

This is an especial disincentive for writing-up students: more than twenty hours per week salaried work compromises research, yet any fewer may pay insufficient. This can affect the quality of work submitted and delay submission time; and, if the researcher is working less than 16 hours per week, actually prolong the time the Social pays their N.I. contributions.

Certain employers require part-time labour and not all part-time jobs combine easily, making the part-time worker a socio-economic necessity. Writing-up research students could meet this need, but

not if their earnings are unfairly deducted from what they are meant to live on while finishing their real, full-time work of writing up theses.

Writing-up students are working towards full-time employment which will hopefully pay back in income tax what they've claimed in less time than it took to claim it - so the sooner they write up, the better. Letting them work, say, up to the 15 hour threshold, without affecting their claims would get more off the dole sooner and contribute towards the better-qualified workforce the Government is supposed to be so desperate to engineer.

The General Secretary's Review of the Year

Tim Brown tells us about the highest and lowest experiences he has had over the past year.

What have you loved about your sabbatical year most?

The days I've found to be the best are when I've been speaking at major conferences possibly being the only person there to convey the voice of the nation's postgraduates. It's quite a privilege to be recognised in such a capacity. It's also been quite an honor to have my name in the press a few times. There are a number of cases where I can see my input has made a difference, which gives the NPC purpose to exist.

I've also really enjoyed visiting institutions around the country to meet affiliates and potential affiliates where the opportunity arises. This is something I see as important and take the time to do as much of it as is possible. It would be great to tour the whole UK, although unfortunately there isn't time as such. Being there to meet different student representative bodies to provide advice and support has been a place where I feel my experience has been used the most.

The best thing about being General Secretary I think is that every day is different, there's so much to learn about and so it's not easy to get bored for that long. It's boosted my leadership experience one step further and will no doubt benefit from it in the future.

What have you found most frustrating?

Stuffing envelopes! That definitely has to be the most boring, time wasting and annoying part of the life of a general secretary. Knowing that I could be using my time more constructively writing a useful piece, visiting an institution or doing a whole load of other things often makes me ask what I'm doing but mailings do need to be sent out on occasions. Administration does take up time, but I have found strategies to overcome this, which I hope to write into a "General Secretary's Survival Guide" eventually. This will make life a lot easier for future General Secretaries.

Another frustrating aspect of this post (and also being a postgraduate representative in general I have noticed) is convincing some student representative bodies that post-

graduates matter. Worse still, I have found some people believe that there is plenty of provision for postgraduates. Such comments largely come from those who are not postgraduates and there are so many misconceptions out there that need to be removed. I've seen and gained so much evidence that shows that postgraduates are in disagreement with such statements. The postgraduate voice has been kept too quiet, it is time it was raised with the means provided to let it happen.

What do you see as your major achievements this year?

I've written a number of responses, the biggest of which are the higher education white paper, the joint funding councils work on improving standards in research degree programmes and the research and assessment review. All of these are highly important to postgraduates and we have often been the only postgraduate voice to ensure the postgraduate perspective is included.

Publishing of a report, "Providing for the Postgraduate Market" has been another important milestone. This subject is certainly one close to my heart in raising awareness that postgraduates are a different peer group, their needs and interests are significantly different from any other group and they need to be addressed specifically. I aim to continue to help NPC advise in this area as institutions become increasingly aware.

Also expanding affiliations has been on the agenda, particularly in London and the South East. There are many institutions to visit, however, and I am keen to reach as many as possible since no General Secretary has been in the area in the past. Getting NPC's database sorted out to ease work pressure in the future has also been achieved as well as organising the 2003 conference.

What do you want to see NPC do in the future?

There are a number of further things I would like to see NPC do in the future which we have not been able to do as yet due to limited resources. I want to see the geography of our representation expand, particularly in Northern

Ireland, which has begun to happen. This is really important for us in advancing postgraduate education in the UK.

Also I really want to see our voice grow beyond postgraduates on research degree programmes and research related taught programmes. There are also many postgraduates on advanced taught courses and teacher training courses who all make up a significant proportion of the postgraduate community. I eagerly wish to see our scope expand in this area and will do whatever I can to ensure this happens.

Also our resources need to grow, which we largely provide on the web. I am keen to see these resources get communicated as much as possible to the individual postgraduate so NPC is more widely known in the postgraduate community for what it does. Finally I also join with other NPC officers over the years to campaign for the long awaited removal of the medieval visitor system, which has caused horrendous problems for a number of postgraduate students.

Any final remarks?

I stood for election as people asked me to in recognition of my passion to see postgraduate education change. That passion hasn't ended and I've certainly not given up on seeing postgraduates have a future. There is still a long way to go and NPC must move on with the times. I don't have the capacity to do this myself, this will require new faces and new ideas to join next year's executive, which I hope to see at the AGM. What I admire most about NPC is that it is a closely-knit community, each one of us has a part to play, which is vital no matter how big or small that role is and I call on us all to take up our roles so that we will go further.

I give my thanks to the rest of the executive, especially Tim as my employer, Chris as my manager in one sense of the word and James as my predecessor. Without them I would never have achieved what I have achieved.



The Lonely Postgrad

Outgoing project officer, Emily Orme, who has had a different postgraduate education from many others, tells us about her experiences of NPC.

Professional postgraduate seeks partnership with GSOH for possible development and future needs. Interested in intellectual conversation and fun weekends away.

Not your average personal ad, but then I am not your "average" postgraduate. I think it is fair to say that the majority of postgrads who become involved in NPC are undertaking research based programmes such as masters or PhD's. Let's face it, we probably have one of the most highly qualified student committees in the country with most of the MSC rapidly turning into Dr's before our very eyes. However, I am not doing a Masters, or a PhD, or any kind of research based course at all. I have over the last two academic years been training to become a lawyer. This is important because what my postgraduate years have involved is taught courses in the style of "you take notes then go home and write the essay" type courses with exams and tutorials. More intensive than an undergrad degree, but less intensive than A levels.

My point about all this is that I am a very different type of postgrad with different needs from NPC and I am not alone. There are thousands of postgrads like me undertaking professional courses to qualify as teachers, nurses, doctors, pharmacists, and so on. We pay massive course fees (my own were £8,125 for this year alone), need to see the continuation of our taught courses and therefore need to see the support for them maintained. This makes it necessary to word any policy NPC may have about the opposi-

tion to taught postgrad courses very carefully indeed.

Through out the last year NPC has really undergone a step change. It has evolved into a charity and in my opinion, taken leaps and bounds forward in gaining recognition from government and other organisations in its ability to voice the views and needs of postgrads. I have been fortunate to benefit from the seemingly encyclopaedic knowledge and experience of people like James Groves and Tim Brown.

However, I also hope that in turn they, and the NPC as a whole, have learned to widen the horizons and representational aims of NPC. It is all too easy for an organisation to become representative solely of the thoughts and beliefs of its officers in charge. I hope that after my participation in MSC meetings and proposals of NPC policy, that the next committee, whoever they are, will take forward the importance of remembering who their constituents are. Don't forget us so-called "professional postgrads". Remember that when you are up in arms over the government's proposals to cut back on research degrees in order to promote taught courses, there are some of us out there who can get caught in the cross fire if you forget our needs.



I wish the NPC all the best for the future. And if you're still wondering about the relevance of the intellectual conversations and fun weekends away, you will have to join the MSC to find out!

NPC Notices

David Manning has resigned as chair of NPC Wales. Plans are going ahead to re-establish NPC Wales in the near future. Should you be interested in being involved with this please get in touch with Tim Brown on npc@npc.org.uk

There will be an Annual General Meeting in Lecture Theatre G14, University College Worcester from 9:00am until 1:00pm.

Nominations are open for all management subcommittee, financial subcommittee and constitutional subcommittee elections as well as associateship and honorary life membership

NPC is organising an event with the UK Council for Graduate Education "New Route PhD or Traditional PhD - What's the best customer deal?" on Wednesday 12th November. More details will be available on the NPC website.

npc  the national postgraduate committee

The National Postgraduate Committee is an independent charity that represents and promotes the needs of UK postgraduates on a national and international stage voicing your opinions to the funding councils, review boards, academic bodies, the media, the government and other relevant bodies. Comprising postgraduate representatives from over 40 institutions and managed by an elected full time general secretary and a team of elected part time officers the NPC forms a national support network issuing UK universities and colleges with up to date guidelines and advice on current affairs. These range from recommended provisions of facilities to the instigation of learning contracts. Through regular OGMs and mailing lists the NPC fulfils the role of a national postgraduate forum providing formal responses to government and non-government papers and proposals. The needs of students in Scottish and Welsh institutions are also catered for by the NPC's Scottish and Welsh Subcommittees.

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