

Hello and welcome to this, the first of a new volume of pn, and also the first one I've edited as NPC Communications officer.

Let me take a few brief words to introduce myself before I introduce you to the contents of pn 3.1. My name is Midge Mistry and am the NPC Communications officer 2003/04. Furthermore, I'm also a Sabbatical Officer, Vice President of Democracy & Communications, at the University of Bath Students' Union. My email is comms@npc.org.uk should you wish to have any items featured in pn this year please feel free to send them to me.

In this edition you have the delights of catching up on where the NPC has been consulting, owing very much to the hard work of the General Secretary. As you can imagine these are still ongoing and work is constantly being done in these areas. Following on from this we have the start of the recruitment drive for the new General Secretary for next year, so if you think you could also make a difference drop us a line!

As stated earlier, this is the first pn for this year's committee as a team. In this issue you'll find out how the team bonded at the executive weekend that was very well hosted at Aston University. At this weekend many items were discussed, one of the most prominent was the new visa charges. The NPC together with other national organisations, most notably the Council for International Students (CIS), are continuing to make progress on this and hopefully we will see a favourable change in the not too distant future. Further reports include the sum-up of the AGM in Worcester were the direct was set for the coming year.

And so, without further ado, welcome again to pn 3.1

Many thanks,
Midge Mistry.
comms@npc.org.uk



Conference 2003 Bigger Than Ever

The 2003 annual conference in Worcester was a fantastic success with atten-

tures far higher than ever expected. It was a great encouragement to see a good turnout from both affiliates and potential affiliates. The first day went to a great start, with speakers on the

main theme, widening participation in postgraduate education. Our speakers, including Prof Sir Martin Harris, identified that widening participation as more than

involvement of lower social classes
inclusion of other groups

such as those from different ethnic backgrounds and gender equality.

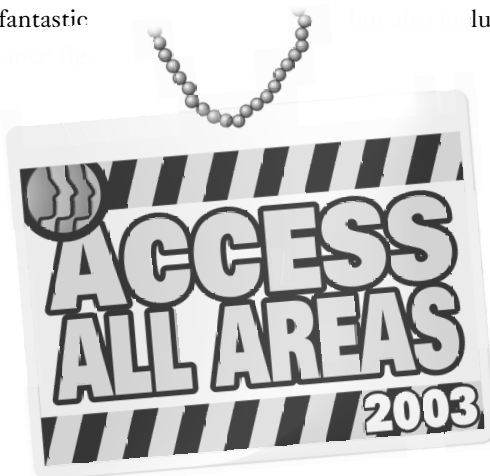
The second day was the most popular attendance wise, where there was a wide range of sessions on the latest postgraduate is-

ssues, as well as training sessions. It was encouraging to see the positive feedback that many present were well informed of postgraduate issues and how to support postgraduates better. Outside

of that there was plenty of opportunity for networking.

The Annual General Meeting saw the passing of motions on visa extensions, the influence of foundation degrees on postgraduate education and guidelines for postgraduate provisions. Also the elections saw the re-election of Chris Neville-Smith as Chair, Tim Brown as General Secretary and Tim Roll-Pickering as Treasurer.

The rest of the Executive officers were also elected helping to make the full complement of the NPC team. The end of the day saw a celebrity music performance in Worcester Students' Union.



A Marathon of Consultations

Responding to consultations has been considerably busier than usual for the NPC, a number have been issued by the funding councils and other organisations largely due to proposals from the Higher Education White

Review of Research Assessment

This is a major consultation headed by Prof Sir Gareth Roberts, President of Wolfson College

programme that facilitates a form of teaching excellence across different subjects or level of study. NPC supports the idea in principle, although does not want to see such funding concentrated on a favoured group of institutions. Also NPC suggests that good teaching practise in the centres is promoted nationwide as well as allowing some centres to be postgraduate specific.

Higher Education Innovation Fund

This consultation is considering how public funding can help institutions facilitate the transfer of knowledge between industry and academia to create innovation. NPC has recommended that effective knowledge transfer does include engaging postgraduates with the outside world and that access to research in each region is essential to support a knowledge based economy.

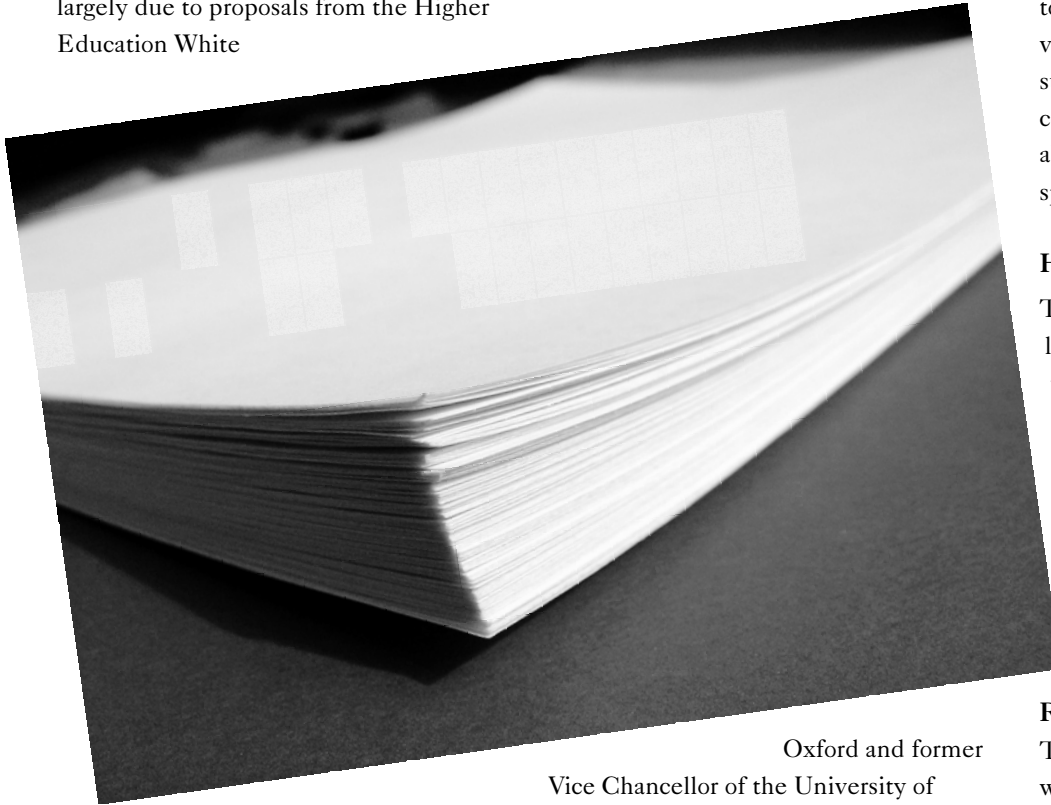
Review of Research Funding Methods

This is considering how research funding will be allocated leading to the next research and assessment exercise and beyond. The most important point for NPC is a new means to fund postgraduate research students, which we are in support of to ensure supervision and training is better funded. However, we are concerned that it does not restrict the funds available to ensure research students are in an effective research environment.

Lord Chancellor's Consultation on the Visitor

This is a consultation on what will happen to the Lord Chancellor's office when the Office of the Independent Adjudicator is established. NPC continues to oppose the existence of the unfair, medieval and archaic system. Should the Visitor really have to remain for minor duties, NPC suggests that an appropriately experienced person for jurisdiction is appointed with the students' right to have their decision challenged by judicial review.

— Tim Brown



Paper published by the Department for Education and Skills in January 2003. Detailed background information to these consultations has been sent out to the NPC's email list. To see the bigger picture, here is a summary of what consultations have been responded to since the AGM in August. All the responses can be found at <http://www.npc.org.uk/essentials/policy>.

Improving Standards in Research Degree Programmes

This is probably one of the most important consultations the NPC has ever had to respond to. The framework for standards in research degree programmes from admissions through to feedback mechanisms is very important to the research student to ensure they get a fair deal. We hope to see the common flaws in supervision and training removed and ask the funding bodies to ensure effective complaints structures are in place for research students.

Oxford and former Vice Chancellor of the University of Sheffield. The research quality assessment proposals include aspects of the development of the researchers, which NPC welcomes.

Scottish Solutions

An enquiry had been issued by the Enterprise Committee in Scotland, to consider the effects of tuition fees in England on Scotland. This could lead to staff moving to England for better work and students going to Scotland for cheaper education. NPC Scotland has responded to this and provided evidence from it's perspective, while strongly opposing any moves to increase graduate endowments with the burden of debt that will result. NPC Scotland recommends further investment from progressive tax to maintain Scotland's economy.

Centres for Excellence in Teaching and Learning (CETLs)

Another idea the government has is to provide funding to institutions who have a

The Independent Adjudicator Appointed

The NPC is pleased to see the long overdue appointment of the independent adjudicator to replace the medieval, archaic and non-impartial University Visitorial system.

At present, the "old Universities" have a Visitor to deal with student complaints if the student is not happy with the way the complaint has been handled internally. The problem is that the Visitor is normally the Queen or Archbishop of Canterbury or someone of similar nature who have no professional experience with student complaints and can take at least a year to respond. The office of the independent adjudicator (OIA) will therefore allow a much more timely response to complaints. The NPC expects more complaints to unfold with a great deal of bureaucracy removed, although expects there to be a learning curve, since many complaints that could be dealt with internally may not be. This would then drain the OIA's resources preventing it from concentrating on the serious cases that did require external arbitration. The most serious and complicated cases are more than likely to involve research students, which can lead to extended investigations.

— Tim Brown

postgrad-ni Mailing List

A new mailing list has been added to the NPC family, postgrad-ni@jiscmail.ac.uk. The list is intended for the discussion of issues affecting postgraduates in Northern Ireland, in anticipation of a NPC-Northern Ireland committee. At the moment, subscribing is only possible via www.jiscmail.ac.uk/lists/postgrad-ni.htm but the mailing list section on the NPC web-site will be updated soon.

— Dries Neiryck
NPC Email List Administrator

NPC Rejects Visa Extension Charges!

NPC has new policy to oppose the introduction of visa extension charges, which will have significant impact on international postgraduates. As an action we have written to the home office and the department for education and skills, with the following concerns:

- Permission may not be given to extend a visa to the end of a course, especially where extensions are required due to unforeseen circumstances.
- Graduation ceremonies often take place several months after course completion so attendance is not financially viable.
- Research students will repeatedly need to extend their visa.
- Dates for viva examinations (which will not be determined until around the time of submission) could be several months after thesis submission.
- Undergraduates will not know of the possibility of continuing to postgradu-

ate study until graduation. Such charges could influence their decision.

- Marketability of postgraduate courses in the UK will fall and degrade a vital aspect of the UK's economy.
- Mobility of research students is restricted due to the limitations of having to extend visas in such a way.

NPC is particularly disappointed that not even the idea of a "season ticket" for research students could be issued knowing they will need to regularly extend their visa.

A response has been received from the Higher Education Minister, Alan Johnson, who claims the services will be largely improved with the charges introduced. This still, however, places concern on the marketability and attractiveness of UK postgraduate education.

— Tim Brown

New Centre for London's Students Unveiled

The University of London and University of London Union (ULU) have released details of a proposed new postgraduate centre within a larger student centre to act as a 1-stop-shop for the capital's students that is planned to open within the next two years.

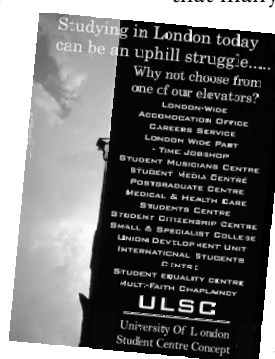
The proposal is a central part of "Transformation", a plan to make ULU more relevant to the needs of London's students in the 21st century. Many other facilities as well as postgraduate facilities are being considered. ULU

President Chris Piper said: "ULU was formed 50 years ago when the University of London and its student population were completely different to now. Our starting point in proposing this was to look at the profile, needs and provision for

the student population and then design a new facility which addresses this rather than looking to simply reform ULU based on its current structure and functions. From this it is becoming increasingly clear that many, many students can benefit

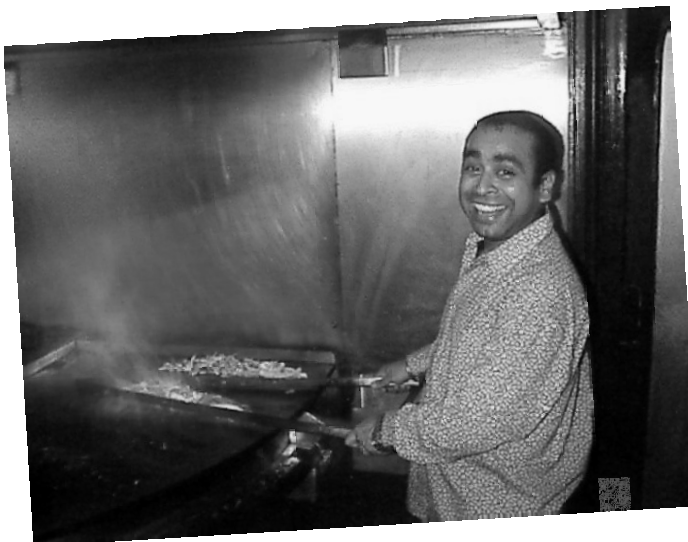
from a central 1 stop shop supporting and supplementing existing college based services or meeting the distinctive needs of postgraduates, medical and health students, international students and the like."

More can be found from ULU's website, www.ulucube.com. Also information specifically on the London Postgraduate Centre (LPC) ideas are at <http://www.ulucube.com/files/transformation/postgrad.htm>.



Executive Weekend in Birmingham a Real Success

The 2003/04 management subcommittee met at Aston University in Birmingham in early September to get to know each other better and plan for the year ahead. The weekend was superbly hosted by Harpreet Singh, an NPC Ordinary Executive Officer, which really helped things to run smoothly. There was time to train on how NPC operates, discuss future projects and plan the next editions of the Journal of Graduate Education. We also considered a strategy to increase



our publicity to attract more affiliates and communicate as effectively as possible via the website.

The social events were also a success, where our Masterchef, Harpreet, took us to his local Mongolian Barbecue which was enjoyed by all. There was also a case of taking care of a celebrity down Birmingham's popular Broad Street. We hope this will be a start to a successful year. You can visit <http://www.npc.org.uk/npc> and see some pictures in the photo diary of what we got up to.

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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Constitutional Subcommittee:
Chris Neville-Smith, Chris Stuart, Peter Campbell, Alex Lewis, Tim Brown, Tim Roll-Pickering, James Groves.

2004 General Secretary Needed!

By constitutional ruling, I must leave my post as full time General Secretary in October 2004, since only two terms of office are allowed. This means that the campaign must begin to call for people to stand for the next General Secretary at our 2004 Annual General Meeting. There are no particular requirements, you just have to convince delegates that you've got the experience and stamina to do the job and then you may just be elected.

There's no denying the post is a straightforward job, but it's a great reward. You will have experience in leadership, organisation, management and a whole host of other skills since the post has a wide range of tasks. Every day is different, which is one of the most enjoyable aspects and speaks volumes to an employer. If you are caught by the idea of being the UK's only postgraduate national sabbatical, please do feel free to talk about it in confidence. My email is npc@npc.org.uk.

— Tim Brown