

Welcome again to *pn* and the second issue for this year!

A lot has happened since November and there has been much progress and a lot to report from the NPC. A lot of this will be covered and discussed in the upcoming OGM on Saturday 18th February in Leeds, feel free to come along.

In this edition, you'll get to read about the effects of the Higher Education Bill and what the future may hold for PG studies in the UK. The NPC has also released guidelines on the remit of Postgraduate Sabbaticals amongst its other recent publications. The NPC are also going to send delegates to Athens for the Eurodoc conference in March. In an equally idyllic location, preparations are well underway for Conference 2004, that is kindly being hosted in Coventry. It's at Conference that the elections will happen for the new General Secretary and the rest of the Exec. To round it all off, you can get to read about what our current General Secretary has been up to recently!

If you have any comments on any of the items, or would like to see additional items featured please do drop me a line on comms@npc.org.uk. So I think its time to now move onto the rest of pn 3.2!

Enjoy!
Midge Mistry.
comms@npc.org.uk



The Higher Education Bill: What Next?

The close vote on the higher education bill was so close that there is clearly a highly division of opinions in Parliament on the future of higher education. For NPC, taking a position on the principle of the higher education bill is a very difficult one. The real question is whether there really is a principle. Contrary to what the media said, the bill was not a bill to introduce tuition fees, it was a bill to reform higher education. The bill came in three main parts; the

first was to introduce the Arts and Humanities Research Council, that means better funding of research and postgraduate support in the arts and humanities, something NPC has long yearned for. The second part of the bill is set to reform student complaints, by removal of Visitorial jurisdiction in old Universities and the introduction of an Independent Adjudicator. You only have to search NPC's website to see for how many years we have vociferously opposed the medieval Visitor system. Finally we have the tuition fees, which not only mean an upper limit of £3,000 for undergraduates in England but a possible increase in this upper limit in years to come. NPC does not support such policy in light of the burden of debt that

will hinder so many from continuing to postgraduate education.

At the vote on the 27th January, either the whole bill had to be accepted or rejected, parts could not be removed or added. The "principle" of the bill was voted on, but with three very independent parts in existence, it therefore has to be questioned exactly what the principle is. Clearly whichever way this bill was voted on was going to be bad news. In this regard, NPC decided to remain neutral and highlight the parts that it does support and those it does not support. At present, NPC can only look to the future. A third hearing is due, with a number of reforms to be considered by the select committee before the third hearing is reached. The forthcoming Ordinary General Meeting in Leeds will discuss NPC's response.

— *Tim Brown*



Nominations Now Open: General Secretary 2004/05

The election of the 2004/05 General Secretary will take place at the Annual General Meeting on Saturday 14th August. I myself will be standing down in October, due to constitutional ruling, and returning to my engineering career, which has been much missed. I hope that there will be keen candidates standing for election to take up a sabbatical post that is of no similarity to any other, a challenge greater than many but has many rewards and provides a reformed and glowing CV. The post is very important as it will largely determine the future of NPC as the only full time post and indeed the UK's only national postgraduate sabbatical. Here are statements given by previous people in the post to show just what it has to offer:

"Being NPC General Secretary offered me huge scope to develop personally and professionally... I am now back working in my academic discipline of psychology but still draw on the skills I developed during my time with the NPC in running my own research organisation"

— Ewan Gillon, General Secretary 1995/96

"The range of different experiences that the position offers must be pretty unique!... Most of all, seeing the real difference that the NPC has been able to make through its work, and the leading role that the General Secretary plays in that, was very exciting...What I am certain about is that the skills I gained as NPC General Secretary would have put me in a good position whatever career path I chose..."

— Jamie Darwen, General Secretary 1994/95

"Every day is different, it teaches so many things, and it's not until a few years time I'll next have the opportunity to be giving keynote conference presentations, being in a key leading position of an organisation and networking across the UK and beyond. I look forward to when I will be a leader in my academic career, as I know what to expect."

— Tim Brown, Incumbent General Secretary, 2002-2004.

If any of you have any enquiries in confidence about the post and would like to find out more, please feel free to get in touch. My email is npc@npc.org.uk and am happy to arrange to meet or talk over the phone as appropriate.

Ordinary General Meeting: Saturday 28 February

The next ordinary general meeting will take place on Saturday 28th February 2004 during the afternoon at the University of Leeds. We plan to have a networking session to exchange ideas on what people around the country are doing with representing postgraduates. This will be from 1330-1430 for those who arrive on time. Following that at 1500 hours, the meeting will formally begin, with a planned end time of 1830 hours. Business to be discussed will include:

- Discussion of the higher education bill, what are the next steps?
- An update on work to lobby regional development agencies for funding taught postgraduate courses.

- First reading of NPC's formal grievance procedure drafted by the constitutional subcommittee, which requires approval of delegates.

We hope the meeting will be a good opportunity to have useful national debate on issues affecting postgraduates but also provide the opportunity for effective networking and sharing ideas both in the workshops and the social events during the weekend. There will be informal policy workshops taking place the following Sunday on the 29th February from 1000 hours to 1300 hours. For more information please contact the General Secretary, Tim Brown on npc@npc.org.uk

New Publications Released

NPC has released some publications since the last edition of *pn* all available with other publications at

<http://www.npc.org.uk/essentials/publications>

The two new publications released are:

- **Complaints in Practice: Complaints in Crisis**, by Tim Brown and Don Staniford.

This report was originally produced by work carried out by Don in 1998 as a project officer who wrote up a report and widely distributed it but it was never made an official publication. It was thought that this work was important to document in the British Library as a contribution to the higher education community in showing the inconsistency, informality, lack of transparency and impartiality in student complaints.

This will also assist as helpful evidence of NPC's continuing campaigns in the area. The report was therefore updated

and made into a publishable format by Tim as a result.

- **Guidelines on the Remit of a Postgraduate Sabbatical Officer**, by Tim Brown.

In light of a number of institutions considering the introduction of a postgraduate sabbatical officer, this short set of guidelines was produced to be used as a template for the remit a postgraduate sabbatical should have.

After these guidelines were approved by NPC in November 2003, Tim was interested to find that his own students' union at the University of Surrey had the intention to introduce a postgraduate sabbatical officer to take office in June so the guidelines immediately went to good use. It is hoped that the guidelines will be of use to a number of other institutions seriously considering introducing a postgraduate sabbatical.

— Tim Brown

What's Tim Been Up To?

Many of you are probably wondering about what I get up to day by day aside all the things you hear about through the email list and things covered in the articles in this newsletter. I thought therefore you might want to find out a bit about some of the other things I've been getting up to. There is of course all the administration dealing with anything up to 60 emails a day answering enquiries that people are sending me from around the UK. As I'm always easily reachable by email wherever I am, it's a great facility to be able to communicate with everyone I need to as effectively as possible and save time for other important things. One thing I have been working hard at is keeping all administrative work down to a minimum so I can block out time to work on important things like publication writing, projects and much more. Here are some of the interesting things I've therefore been working on:

- Visiting institutions has been something I have taken the opportunity to do as much as possible and continue to do so. London has been a key target there through working with University of London Union to help set up a postgraduate network, which will help NPC have a base in London for my successor. Also I have visited cities in the far northern parts of England including Newcastle, Liverpool and Manchester and plan to visit more in the future including Scotland and Wales.
- Expanding resources for student representative bodies is something I have

been yearning to do for ages, which I do around the holiday periods when there are less meetings on etc.

Obviously the more literature I can produce, the more impact and benefit this will have nationally. At present I am writing further resources to "upgrade" our resource folder. I plan to complete this by the summer, where I will be able to send out an "upgrade kit" to affiliates to add the new sections to their existing resource folder. That is indeed the intention of the resource folder, which is also available on the website. Further to this I am re-drafting a guide with NUS entitled "Increasing involvement of postgraduates in your students' unions". Using this guide with the help of NUS I hope to promote the point that involving postgraduates is an important dimension of equal opportunities in student representative bodies. This will hopefully help us to reach many student bodies (and indeed many thousands of postgraduates).

- Working on eurodoc related business, as coordinator of the supervision and training workgroup. My plan here is to develop a charter for supervision and training across Europe that all countries can recognise. This has involved collecting information from across EU countries and trying to bring it together to get a common understanding of expected standards in different countries.
- Working on conference planning, to invite speakers, plan the programme and all the other little details that our big event involves!

- Working with the Quality Assurance Agency to re-write the code of practise for research degree programmes. This has begun in a working group that myself and Jen Crowe of the University of Birmingham are attending (where Jen is the official representative). From attending the workgroup, the opportunity arose to emphasise the need for effective complaints procedures in research degree programmes and also induction programmes. We have been granted permission to write parts of this code where our interest and experience will benefit, which is an excellent opportunity for NPC. I myself certainly walked out of that meeting saying to myself "it's at times like these I know why NPC needs to exist". Without our presence there, the needs and interests of postgraduates would not have reached the right people.



At present I am getting pen to paper on all the things that have come my way and other people's way as to what would be useful for NPC to do. As ever there is a limit as to what we can do but I am keen to identify what the priorities should be. Two things I am fervently keen to do is expand NPC's horizons towards identifying the needs of part time postgraduates and those in teacher training. This is something on the agenda for the future.

Coventry: The 2004 Conference Venue

This is a place you may well have passed through when travelling on the cross country train service. Coventry is the home of the first car, the Lanchester, one of the newest built Cathedrals and a wealth of history both old and new. The centrality on the railway lines and its proximity to Birmingham Airport by train makes it a good location for NPC's 2004 Annual Conference from 12th-15th August.

Attendees will have accommodation available on campus within easy reach of the lecture theatres and eating places. There will also be opportunity during the conference to visit local attractions. The subject NPC wishes to cover this year is the future of postgraduate education, which will largely be determined by where the higher education bill will go. This is something that will be uncertain and it is likely we will have a key opportunity to consider what the next steps of action are for 21st Century postgraduate education.

General Secretary Visits Northern Ireland

As NPC is officially registered as "The National Postgraduate Committee of the United Kingdom", it is important that specific work is carried out within areas of devolved activity. This has already taken place in both Scotland and Wales by implementing appropriate sub-committees. However, there has been some considerable development taking place to ensure the interests of postgraduates in Northern Ireland are included. The NPC executive are particularly pleased that there are now two affiliates in Northern Ireland this year, which is a significant step in the right direction to set up a base there.

The General Secretary, Tim Brown and an Ordinary Executive Officer, Benson Osawe, went over to Belfast in November to visit the two Universities there and also NUS-USI (the National Union of Students and Union of Students in Ireland). A number of projects have been identified that can be taken up both independently and jointly with NUS-USI. This includes lobbying the Department for Employment and Learning in Northern Ireland on funding postgraduate training from the Roberts recommendations, extending the postgraduate employment charter for those who teach and campaigning against loans for taught postgraduates are all but a few. NPC plans to include this work into its wider activity so that all areas of the UK with devolved activity are not forgotten.

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.

General correspondence to:

General Secretary:

Tim Brown
University of Surrey Students' Union
Union House
University of Surrey
Guildford
Surrey
GU2 7XH
Tel: 01483 683 921
Fax: 01483 534749 (Mark FAO Tim Brown)
npc@npc.org.uk
<http://www.npc.org.uk/>

Honorary President: Prof. Sir Martin Harris

Chair: Chris Neville-Smith,
chair@npc.org.uk

Treasurer: Tim Roll-Pickering, treasurer@npc.org.uk

Conference Secretary: Joe Rukin, conference@npc.org.uk

Minutes Secretary: James Groves, minutes@npc.org.uk

Communications Officer: Midge Mistry,
comms@npc.org.uk

Equal Opportunities Officer: Habiba Hamid,
equalopps@npc.org.uk

Project Officers:

Marilyn Shanks, mvcscha@essex.ac.uk
Rachel Mu, q.mu@postgrad.umist.ac.uk
Dries Neiryneck, dries.neiryneck@bristol.ac.uk
Jim Ewing, 7823561E@student.gla.ac.uk

Ordinary Executive Officers:

Benson Osawe, postgrad@umu.man.ac.uk
Harpreet Singh, guild.welfare@aston.ac.uk

Scottish Subcommittee:

Chair: Chris Stuart, chrisnusscotts@yahoo.co.uk
Vice-chair/Secretary: Jim Ewing,
7823561E@student.gla.ac.uk

Welsh Subcommittee:

Treasurer: Natasha Hirst, natashahirst@yahoo.com

Finance Subcommittee:

Tim Roll-Pickering, Jim Ewing, Natasha Hirst, Martin Gough, Tim Brown, Chris Neville-Smith, James Groves, Joe Rukin, Andrew Thompson.

Constitutional Subcommittee:

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

Lobbying Regional Development Agencies

In May 2003, NPC met with Margaret Hodge, the then minister for lifelong learning, further and higher education. Amongst a number of other things, the discussion of regional development agencies (RDAs) funding taught postgraduate courses as a way of developing the needs of the regional economy was raised. Since the meeting, it was found that there was no reason as to why a RDA could not fund taught postgraduate courses. As NPC recognises the benefit of taught postgraduate education including the benefit to society and the economy, the opportunity to develop students to undertake research degrees and the desire from employers for qualifications beyond graduation, this is a positive step forward to allow funding to be available.

In light of policy passed at the ordinary general meeting in November 2003, the next ordinary general meeting this coming February will approve a paper to be presented to a RDA to begin the process of lobbying for funding of taught postgraduate courses.

Eurodoc 2004 heads to Athens

The 2004 eurodoc conference will take place in Athens from the 18th-21st March. The UK delegates have been elected as Harpreet Singh (Aston and Ordinary Executive Officer) and Jill Meadows (Bristol). Also Tim Brown will be heading over in his capacity as coordinator of the eurodoc supervision and training workgroup. Highlights this year will see presentation of work carried out on mobility of researchers throughout Europe and also a charter for supervision and training of PhD students (who are otherwise known in the European Union as "Early Stage Researchers") agreed by delegates from across Europe. More information can be found from eurodoc's website at www.eurodoc.net.