

Hello everyone and welcome to this the last pn of the year and the last one I'll be editing!

In *pn* 3.3 we have for you a wealth of ideas and articles to help elevate some of the pressures of studying, writing up and general deadlines. So kick off your shoes, recline back on your chair and chill-out for a few minutes while I tell you what's coming up in this edition.

The NPC has been busy travelling and meeting various people, including Alan Johnson, the NPC has also been to Athens at Eurodoc 2004. You can also read about the NPC's stance on fees for the new EU countries, as well as the research conducted in conjunction with UK GRAD. The NPC has also further developed its resources folder that is soon to be re-launched.

In addition to all of that we have the Annual Conference that is held in Coventry. This is where the elections for the 2004/05 NPC committee will take place and a new General Secretary will be elected!

To keep yourselves updated with what's going on, don't forget to visit www.npc.org.uk and browse the site. Well, that's covered about everything from my point of view. All that remains, is for me to wish you all the best and say good bye, 'goodbye'!



NPC Meets the Minister

ON THE 20th May 2004, four representatives from NPC (Tim Brown, Tim Roll-Pickering, Chris Neville-Smith and Tasha Hirst) went along to the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) to meet Alan Johnson MP, Minister for Lifelong Learning, Further and Higher Education. The meeting discussed a number of items including issues around career development loans, NPC's efforts on lobbying Regional Development Agencies (RDAs) to fund taught postgraduate courses, issues around new EU students being charged overseas fees and widening participation towards postgraduate education.

All present felt the meeting was a very positive opportunity to lobby government on some of the key issues concerning NPC at present not only relating to the higher education bill but also in terms of how postgraduate education in the UK needs to widen its participation and not

become increasingly reliant on international intake, who are a significant income source to higher education. There was a strong appreciation from Mr Johnson that the white paper has not focused on taught postgraduates and that the concerns of the career development loan and

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its lack of compatibility with the future proposals on the student loan do need to be reviewed. NPC did stress at the very least the loan be extended to postgraduates, which was appreciated as necessary although funding to subsidise this may not necessarily be readily available.

Warm support was given for our efforts to lobby RDAs to fund taught postgraduate

courses, which NPC hopes will move forward in the future. Further to this, there was useful discussion on the widening participation into postgraduate education following conclusions from our annual conference. The need for further research in this area was certainly acknowledged and Mr Johnson expressed interest in further evidence from us on the subject. We were consequently actioned to send more information on this but also at the same time were able to note that widening participation was more than social class inclusion and should include women, ethnic groups, disabled students and others whom have been traditionally disadvantaged by circumstances. Some coverage of the EU accession students was also given, which will be covered later in this edition of the newsletter.

More details about the meeting can be seen from our features archive at www.npc.org.uk/features.

Higher Education Bill Update

Since the Easter vacation, the higher education bill had left the House of Commons after its third reading and is now at the time of going to print under heated debate in the House of Lords. The second reading (which was the first official debate in the Lords) was on April the 19th where there were 46 speakers on the bill (it is normal only to have around 5 or 6) so there was much divide over what the bill was intending to do.

NPC is encouraged to see that the Lords endorsed the introduction of the Arts and Humanities Research Council, where it was declared that there would be funding stipends of up to £10,000 for research students as well as provision for Roberts training, which other research councils provide. Further to this, there was support to remove Visitorial jurisdiction from student complaints, as a number of the Lords were indeed Visitors themselves.

The ever continuing debate on tuition fees has continued to cause concerning debate in the house. NPC was most encouraged to see an amendment to the bill by Lord Freyberg, who will be a postgraduate himself next year and has seen the concerns of the lack of funding for postgraduates in certain areas. For this reason he has pushed an amendment to extend the student loan to postgraduates. The final decision over this amendment has not yet been met at the time of going to print. All this may be good news, although concern still circles around what the implications of the undergraduate tuition fees will be in terms of how a graduate can extend their debt even further to continue their studies or research.

NPC at Eurodoc 2004

At the end of March three people from NPC went to Athens to be at the 2004 Eurodoc conference. Harpreet Singh and Jill Meadows went as delegates while Tim Brown went in his capacity as coordinator of the supervision and training workgroup. It was a splendid opportunity for Eurodoc to meet again with NPC's counterparts in Europe to discuss a European perspective on issues including mobility, supervision and training, career paths and gender equality. NPC has become involved in Eurodoc this year with Tim Brown continuing with his work coordinating the supervision and training workgroup and at the same time Harpreet Singh being elected to the board as an ordinary member. To find out more about Eurodoc's work check out their website at www.eurodoc.net.

New Resource Folder on its Way

IN 2001, NPC launched its first resource folder, the biggest publication it has ever produced also available online at www.npc.org.uk/essentials, most of which is accessible to affiliates only. Being a folder it is open to being a renewable publication and the time has now come where some renewal will be beneficial. In light of this Tim Brown has been busy writing some sections to add to the resource folder when he has had the time to do so and now hopes to re-publish the resource folder as a second edition in the not too distant future. The new folder will contain an update of recent policy responses, guidelines and other short publications. Further to this there will be a wealth of support material for affiliates and information to individual postgraduates in affiliated institutions. Here are some examples of what will be included. For supporting and representing postgraduates there will be information on:

- Communicating to postgraduates
- Allocating finances to support postgraduates
- Models of postgraduate representation
- Representing postgraduates in small institutions

- Tips for postgraduate based institutions
- How do we involve postgraduates? — The answers
- Ideas on postgraduate social activities
- Ideas on a postgraduate website area

Further to this there will be information for the individual postgraduate that can be linked to via local websites and used to directly benefit the individual postgraduate from affiliates. Here are some examples of what will be there:

- Isolation for research students
- Complaints and appeals for postgraduates
- Failing a research degree viva, what next?
- Breakdown with supervisor

Tim hopes these upgrades will prove useful to help answer the frequent questions he receives from student representative bodies and also individual postgraduates. This is indeed only the start and Tim also hopes even more that it will be possible to get a third edition out in the not too distant future since the resource folder is one of the most useful items it has been able to produce for its affiliates while meeting its important charitable aims.

NPC says Fees for EU Accession Students to be Reduced Immediately

On the 1st May 2004, ten new countries joined the European Union. However, for the remaining three or four months after accession, these postgraduate students will still be charged fees at overseas student rate. For a number of postgraduate courses, the difference in fees is in the region of £3,000. NPC believes this is discrimination against such students and not in the spirit of the European Union.

So what has been happening since that meeting? Well, NPC has written plenty of letters to bodies including Universities UK, the body for Vice Chancellors and also it has taken the matter to the Department for Education and Skills, where the matter was also discussed with Alan Johnson MP, Minister for Lifelong Learning, Further and Higher Education. After discussing the matter with Mr Johnson he saw it as open to the institutions to deal with, who may possibly charge fees on a termly basis and so could charge at EU rate for the final term. This was entirely up to the institutions, however, and the only means at present to deal with the matter is to lobby them all individually.

A press release was also taken in by *Guardian Online*, which was published soon after the 1st May. This will certainly push some public interest in the issue. NPC was also able to take an emergency motion to NUS National Council where we have their support in the campaign but also the ability to encourage other member organisations of the National Union of Students in Europe (ESiB) to take part. As a means of helping postgraduate representatives and student representative bodies across the UK, NPC has produced campaign material available on the website. You can also email the general secretary on npc@npc.org.uk for further information. Everyone is encouraged to use this in helping the new EU accession students.

Conference 2004 All Set

THE 2004 Conference will be taking place at Coventry University from the 12th-15th August. At this event there will be a wealth of things taking place.

Key speakers include:

- Dr Ian Gibson MP, Chair of the Science and Technology Select Committee of the House of Commons. Dr Gibson has been actively involved in opposition to the implications of the higher education bill and will certainly be in a position to speak on its potential effect on postgraduate education.
- Dr Steve Wharton, Vice President of the Association of University Teachers (AUT). Dr Wharton has also been elected as president of the AUT for 2004/05 and will be speaking as a member of the Higher Education Research Forum run by the Department for Education and Skills, which Tim Brown also sits on. The forum is currently investigating the links between research and teaching, which will have significant impact on the future of postgraduates should funding be heavily concentrated.
- Gill Clarke and Janet Borher from the Quality Assurance Agency will be talking on the new code of practice for research degrees set for publication in September 2004. This code will have significant impact on the quality and standards in research degree programmes and highly influence how institutions implement their own code. This will be important for any representative of postgraduates as they will no doubt have an important role during the coming academic year to ensure their institution is correctly implementing their own code of practice.
- Dr Janet Metcalfe and Ellen Pearce from UK GRAD will be presenting some results of a survey carried out with NPC, and how the results from

that survey will play an important role in the future of progress monitoring and skills development for research students.

- Prof Howard Green, UK Council for Graduate Education will be speaking on the diversity in postgraduate programmes in the future with the wide choice and trends that are now available.
- Dame Ruth Deech, Office of the Independent Adjudicator (OIA). For years NPC has been longing to see the introduction of the OIA and the removal of the medieval University Visitorial system. Now the day has finally come and we will hear from the OIA how things are going with handling student complaints on an external level.

Throughout the conference there will also be training sessions and other smaller parallel sessions, since the main aim and success of NPC's annual conference is to help facilitate effective familiarisation with postgraduate issues and enable student officers to support and represent their postgraduates. More details about the conference can be found from www.npc.org.uk/events, where you will find the programme and booking forms.

General Secretary Visits Northern Ireland

Just after the Easter holidays Tim Brown made a second trip to Northern Ireland this year to observe NUS-USI conference, which was an enormous help to meet representatives from student bodies in Northern Ireland and learn more about the local policy that is implemented there. There was also a good opportunity to tell others there about representing postgraduates and the importance of building up NPC's base in Northern Ireland for the benefit of postgraduates there. A number of areas necessary to campaign have been identified and there are already plans under way to get this work going further whilst also working closely with NUS-USI.



In the future NPC hopes that a sub committee will be set up in Northern Ireland from which an officer can be elected to communicate and assist with implementing policy in Northern Ireland, which is essential. Already a discussion list, postgrad-ni@jiscmail.ac.uk has been set up where postgraduate representatives are being gradually added and are able to now communicate more of the issues facing postgraduates in Northern Ireland.

NPC Conducts National Survey With UK GRAD

In recent months, NPC has put together an online survey working with UK GRAD to try and obtain some vital information for a larger research project currently being undertaken by UK GRAD. The UK GRAD programme (www.grad.ac.uk) is designed to facilitate training and personal development for postgraduate research students, which will soon become largely compulsory following recommendations by Prof Sir Gareth Roberts on his report to enhance the supply of innovative scientists and engineers. This has recently led to institutions regularly talking about "Roberts Training", which is being introduced across the UK.

One important part of Roberts training is to investigate how personal development planning, or progress monitoring will play an important role not only to keep a track record of progress but to help identify training needs of the research student and how training is enhancing the student's generic skills and professional development. This is vital in bringing out skilled 21st century researchers. NPC has had an important role here in collecting information on progress review from individual postgraduates by carrying out a national online survey. Through the power of communication from its own email lists, over 1000 responses have been received. NPC and UK GRAD are grateful for those responses and also to those who have distributed the survey to postgraduates. This project shows how important NPC's work is in terms of how it can engage the interests of postgraduates into the right places and has an important role in doing so for the benefit of all postgraduates.

Elections 2004 On Their Way

IT COULD be you. NPC only achieves what it does by postgraduates and other interested people getting involved, where there are a wealth of ways to build collaborative skills through contributing to national initiatives. There are 14 voluntary positions, some with a little more work than others but all manageable and well worth taking up. There is bound to be a position you can stand for and perform effectively.

One thing that will definitely happen this year is the election of a new General Secretary, the only position available full time and the only postgraduate national sabbatical post in the UK running from October 2004 to October 2005. Again, you could be in a position where you are

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able to take this up and you could find it is one of the most fantastic career steps available. You are more than welcome to talk to Tim Brown, the incumbent General Secretary in confidence at npc@npc.org.uk about this. Here's what those in the past have said about the post:

"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."

— Ewan Gillon,
General Secretary 1995/96

"My year as NPC General Secretary was in many ways the most rewarding experience of my life. The range of different experiences that the position offers must be pretty unique! Working with everyone from postgraduate students and students' union officers to vice-chancellors, speaking at a host of different conferences, dealing with the media...made for a hugely varied and challenging year but one that also made a huge impact."

— Jamie Darwen,
General Secretary 1994/95

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

Reforming Research Degrees: NPC couldn't be more needed

Recently NPC has been attending and had active involvement in meetings of the Quality Assurance Agency workgroup to reform the code of practice for research degrees. When going into meetings and discussing work carried out, Tim Brown has said to himself "our presence here could not show more clearly why NPC is needed". While reforming the code of practice of research degrees, NPC's involvement has ensured that the interests of postgraduates and their "student centred" focus on the new code is implemented as best as possible. Without NPC, there would be no opportunity whatsoever to hear the interests of postgraduates across the UK. All members of the workgroup with an interest in research degrees have contributed written drafts to the research code. NPC has been contributing much on complaints and appeals and also inductions, where our knowledge at grassroots level has been of vital importance to reform the inherent problems there currently in existence.

The new code of practice will be going to consultation during June, where others from NPC can respond to it should they feel that any further amendment is needed from what the working group has planned. Following that, the plan is that it will go to publication in September 2005.