

## White Paper Offers Mixed Blessings for Postgraduates

After almost a year's delay, the Government's white paper on higher education in England is now out. It's online at:

[www.dfes.gov.uk/highereducation/hstrategy/](http://www.dfes.gov.uk/highereducation/hstrategy/)

The white paper's potential effects on postgraduate education will be discussed at the NPC OGM in Bristol. We hope that you will join us to help guide the NPC's official response.

From a postgraduate point of view, there is much in the white paper to commend. In particular there is a welcome focus on the value of research — postgraduate research specifically. Unfortunately there is almost no mention of postgraduate taught education; a worrying feature, given this is one of the fastest growing areas of higher education. The issue of undergraduate fees and funding, which has dominated the headlines, is inevitably likely to have a knock-on impact on postgraduate access and resourcing — the NPC will be hoping to raise its concerns on these matters over the coming months.

Below is a summary of those parts of the white paper which relate specifically to postgraduate education. The majority will apply to England only, but some, notably those affecting the AHRB and the powers of the Privy Council, will apply UK wide.

- There will be increased research funding for the best 5\* departments — “at subject as well as at institutional level, it is critical that we focus our resources on the strongest, who bring us the best returns” (clause 2.15).
- The Arts and Humanities Research Board (AHRB) is to become the Arts and Humanities Research Council (clause 2.23).
- There will be financial support for promising but low RAE rated departments (clause 2.21).
- Following the recommendations of the Roberts Review, there is likely to be a concentration of PhD provision in research consortia with high standards of training, with the possibility that in time only these consortia may have research (or maybe postgraduate in general — the text is ambiguous) degree awarding powers (clause 2.26).
- There will be a national student feedback survey available for the first time in Autumn 2003 - this will be for undergraduates only, however (clause 4.2).
- The NUS “will take the lead in publishing a comprehensive and easily accessible guide to higher education, that covers not only course data but other key factors such as whether the provider is a centre of excellence, the quality of its IT provision and other facilities, entry requirements, results and the employment record of its graduates” (clause 4.5). It is not clear whether this guide would apply to postgraduates.
- Legislation will create an independent reviewer of student complaints (clause 4.12). Before the reviewer is placed on a statutory basis the DfES has “asked the sector to press ahead with establishing a voluntary independent adjudicator in the meantime. The aim is for the office of the independent adjudicator to be in place by June 2003 and

Welcome to the first 2003 edition of *pn*.

It has proved an eventful year so far with the much-anticipated release of the government's white paper on the future of higher education; James Groves takes a look at the papers potential effect on postgraduate education. In addition we cover the responses resulting from the November OGM in Cardiff and take a look at some of the ways postgraduate representation can be increased in our student unions.



*Teresa Rees (author of the Rees report) discusses some of the recent developments in the government's approach to postgraduate education with attendees at the Cardiff OGM.*

We recently distributed a general NPC article for publication in your student union magazine or newsletter — thank you to those who passed this on to the relevant media officer. It is important that the UK postgraduate community recognise the NPC as a national body representing and working on their behalf. Please feel free to duplicate any part of this newsletter for general readership and do let us know what's happening with your postgraduate association, send an article for the web site or the next edition of *pn*. As we say in Bath; got a degree, got a life, got involved!

— Paul Williams  
Communications Officer  
[www.npc.org.uk](http://www.npc.org.uk)

ready to receive representations and adjudicate from September 2003". The legislation will, *inter alia*, abolish the office of Visitor in chartered universities.

- The Institute for Learning and Teaching in Higher Education (ILT), the Learning and Teaching Support Network (LTSN) and the Higher Education Staff Development Agency (HESDA) are to be merged into one body covering teaching quality, the "teaching quality academy" (clause 4.25).
- The title "university" will be awarded based on taught degree awarding powers, student numbers and range of subjects offered, and *not* research degree awarding powers (clauses 4.31 to 4.35). Changes are expected to come into force in 2004/2005.
- Changes to university statutes and instruments of government will no longer require Privy Council approval (clause 7.10).

One as-yet-unresolved issue concerns the powers of the National Assembly for Wales, which presently does not have responsibility for fees or statutory student support in Wales. Despite media rumours that the white paper would announce a transfer of these powers, this has not emerged and we are merely told that negotiations are continuing.

There is no doubt that this white paper is a landmark document, and responding to it will be the NPC's key priority over the next few months. If you want to pass your thoughts on to the NPC but cannot make the OGM in Bristol, please email the NPC General Secretary, Tim Brown, at [npc@npc.org.uk](mailto:npc@npc.org.uk).

— James Groves

## NPC Conference 2003 to be held in Worcester

Worcester is a historic city in the Heart of England, a unique blend of the old and the new. The Civil War began and ended in Worcester; its cathedral and many old timbered buildings reflect an often turbulent past. The River Severn divides University College Worcester (UCW) from the city centre, but is easily accessible on foot or by car.

The city is home to several sporting venues from County Cricket, Rugby Union and the famous Pitchcroft Racecourse. Perhaps its three main claims to fame are Worcestershire Sauce, Worcester Porcelain and Sir Edward Elgar.

The NPC will be holding their annual conference in Worcester between Thursday 14th and Sunday 17th August 2003. The venue is UCW, which is situated close in the west bank of the River Severn. The new principal, Prof David Green, has kindly agreed to support the conference and give a welcoming address.



We have been extremely fortunate in getting favourable responses from speakers who will test our knowledge, channel our enthusiasm and make us pause for thought. Worcester Students Union has planned an exciting programme of events for Thursday and Saturday evening and of course there will be a stunning Conference Dinner on Friday evening.

— Sue Barnes, Conference Secretary

## NPC OGM at the University of Bristol SU, 15-16<sup>th</sup> February

All postgraduate representatives, education officers and anyone else with an interest in postgraduate issues are welcome to attend.

### Saturday 15th February Training Session & OGM

#### *1pm: Training Session*

Free training session especially for postgraduate officers and those involved in postgraduate representation. The training will be presented by Dave Jarman who is based at the University of Bristol.

#### *3pm - 6.30pm: NPC OGM with items for discussion including:*

Our response to the future of higher education white paper. Elections will be held for the recently vacated positions of two project officers and one member of the financial sub committee. Some of the by-law changes recommended by the constitutional sub-committee will be forwarded for initial approval.

There will be social events in the evening organised by Bristol University's Postgraduate Society.

### Sunday 16th February Policy Workshops

*10am-1pm:* These open and informal discussions on NPC policy will provisionally include a consultation paper on improving standards in research degree programmes and a consultation from the Institute of Learning and Teaching (ILT). The policy workshops will take place between 10am and 1pm.

## NPC Notices

- The main item of business at the Bristol OGM will be a discussion on the Higher Education White Paper. Any motions or amendments related to the White Paper will be accepted up to the start of the meeting. Please submit motions if you have any views on this — we need as wide an input from postgraduates as possible.
- Gemma Cansell and Rainy Mears have resigned as Project Officers for unavoidable reasons, therefore there will be by-elections for two project officers at the OGM. If you wish to stand for these positions, please be ready to state to the OGM what project

you would like to do if you are elected. Gemma and Rainy are happy to assist anyone who wishes to take over their project on PDP. There will also be a by-election for one position to the Finance Subcommittee. Please contact Tim Brown or Chris Neville-Smith for further details on how to stand for any of these positions.

- NPC has been invited to send one delegate and one observer to the MSU Conference on the 22nd - 23rd March to elect a new MSU executive. These positions will be elected at the Bristol OGM and anyone may stand for these positions. Being a mature postgradu-

ate would be an advantage but is not essential.

- The Management Sub-Committee held two emergency elections in January for two representatives whose positions become vacant after the last OGM. As a result, Si Stafford was appointed to the ILT Board and Rachel Mu was appointed as a delegate to the UKCGE Winter Conference.
- The Constitutional Sub-Committee has appointed Dries Nierynck as its new email list administrator to take over from Jamie Darwen.
- NPC Scotland meeting, 15th March in Inverness.

# Increasing Postgrad Representation in your Union

The NPC will be holding a number of training sessions over the coming year to prepare union officers for representing postgraduate students. Why is this important? And what can you do to get postgraduate issues more into the union limelight?

The number of postgraduate students is as high as ever - currently a total of almost 400,000, 20% of the UK student body. As government funding has not risen, the number of self-funded postgraduates has had to; in consequence potential students are more aware of 'value for money' and institutions are realising the greater need for improved facilities and representation. The recent NPC surveys on funding and facilities show that this is a significant factor taken into account when graduates are considering where to continue their studies. Also significant is the way the student union caters for its postgraduates, traditionally the charge of undergraduates many are now becoming wise to their other market. But this change in attitude does not happen overnight, especially when we consider the difficulties in defining exactly what the postgraduate community actually is. Postgraduates are ever more loaded with teaching and research responsibilities, but are not treated quite the same as staff and yet do not share all of the same needs and interests as undergraduates. Moreover the main representative of the postgraduate community is typically the welfare or

education sabbatical; often recent graduates or even undergraduates on a year out. They have the inevitable problem of having no experience of postgraduate life and as such postgraduate students may be hesitant to approach them with issues. So how can a university or union cater for its ever expanding postgraduate community? Create a postgraduate association - incredibly valuable but, as I have come to realise, often restricted to the status of a club or society - surely postgraduates should have a higher status than the pub-crawl society!

## Getting a Sabbatical

Another option that some institutions such as Oxford have chosen to take is to get a sabbatical officer and others like Cambridge and York also have an independent Graduate Union. In these institutions the sabbatical post has greatly enhanced the status and awareness of postgraduate representation. Sounds easy, but unfortunately postgraduates are typically not motivated to influence such constitutional changes. Postgraduates are often seen as working much harder than undergraduates and with less time on their hands, therefore it is difficult to find postgraduates willing to be part-time representatives. This can be and has been used successfully as an argument for a postgraduate sabbatical; if postgraduates are to be adequately represented they need someone who is dedicated to doing just this, they need a full time sabbatical.

Don't be put of by the idea that no-one will stand for the position, just think of how many union hacks stay on to pursue postgraduate education!

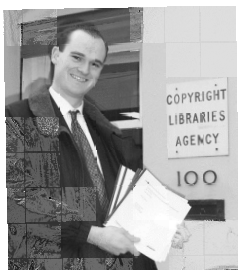
If you feel that your union needs a postgraduate sabbatical the first step is to get the support of union officers and councillors, make them aware of the issues and put forward relevant motions to increase postgraduate presence in the union structure. The university itself can be pivotal to your proposals as they will probably be more aware of the pressure postgraduates are under and also have a vetted interest in attracting postgraduates to their fields of research. The Graduate School directly funds a number of postgraduate committees including UCL and Sheffield; maybe your graduate school would be willing to fund a sabbatical post. Securing this kind of support may even eventually lead to the formation of an independent or semi-independent graduate union.

Is your postgraduate association still considered no more than a club or society? Are you working towards getting your own postgraduate sabbatical? If you are a postgraduate sabbatical, how valuable is the position? Let us know about the challenges that have faced you and your union, become an NPC *pn* contributor and spread the word.

— Paul Williams

## NPC Responses

At the November NPC OGM in Cardiff members were invited to contribute at two policy workshops from which two formal responses have been submitted. These responses along with the results of the NPC's postgraduate funding survey — which was handed over to the copyright libraries agency on the 21st of January — can be accessed on



our web site: [www.npc.org.uk](http://www.npc.org.uk).

### Response to the Joint Funding Bodies Review of Research Assessment

This consultation looks at what quality research is and whether it is reflected by the current UK research and assessment exercise. We consider the different options available for assessment and show our support to a peer assessment on quality research. We show our idea of research quality to be that of well published data and in terms of the contribution that

the research has to the wider international community and society in general. As students we would also identify high research quality in terms of the management and development of researchers in a unit. Our response can be downloaded from:

[www.npc.org.uk/page/1038664226.pdf](http://www.npc.org.uk/page/1038664226.pdf)

The review of Research Assessment can be read at:

[www.hefce.ac.uk/research](http://www.hefce.ac.uk/research)

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continued overleaf

## Response to the Joint Funding Council's Report on Improving Standards for Postgraduate Research Degrees

This explores the case for improving standards for research students ranging from supervision standards, quality assurance and training. The NPC sees this as a positive step to help combat the many often unforeseen problems experienced by research students, many of whom have no access to such standards. We do however raise concerns as to how the performance indicators will be implemented, particularly in smaller or emerging research units, which have limited funding and resources. Our response can be downloaded from:

[www.npc.org.uk/page/1038664294.pdf](http://www.npc.org.uk/page/1038664294.pdf)

This funding council's report can be found at:

[www.hefce.ac.uk/pubs/RDreports/Downloads/report13.htm](http://www.hefce.ac.uk/pubs/RDreports/Downloads/report13.htm)

## The GATS Affair, An NPC Consultation and Response

The NPC has submitted a consultation response to the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) for the General Agreement on Trade and Services (GATS).

We responded on a number of points including the potential affect of GATS on quality assurance, increased tuition fees to international market rates and the difficulties that could arise with cross border trading for virtual and distance learning. Our full response can be downloaded from:

[www.npc.org.uk/page/1041624140.pdf](http://www.npc.org.uk/page/1041624140.pdf)

The consultation can be found at:

[www.dti.gov.uk/worldtrade/service.htm](http://www.dti.gov.uk/worldtrade/service.htm)

## By-Laws Summit Meeting

On the 26th January, the constitutional sub committee met in Sheffield to discuss the logistics of the revised by-laws. It is necessary to make these revisions to bring them in line with the new constitution and the NPC's recently acquired charitable status. The main by-laws that were covered include those referring to: affiliation fee and protocol, the rules on membership admissions, voting regulations and officer remits. Also covered were meeting regulations and any disciplinary procedures that may be necessary should any problems arise. The by-laws will ensure the continued fair and democratic structure of NPC that will meet the interests of all its members. Ratification of these will occur at NPC OGMs.

*pn* is edited by Paul Williams, NPC Communications Officer, and co-edited by Tim Brown and produced by Article Seven. It is sent to affiliates' institutions each term, and is also made available on the NPC web site. Contributions from everyone are welcome, from NPC Officers to postgrads with no involvement with NPC but who have something to say. If you are interested in contributing to future issues, please contact the editor at [psmpaw@bath.ac.uk](mailto:psmpaw@bath.ac.uk).

## 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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**Ordinary Executive Officers:**  
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Sue Grogan, [s.grogan@sheffield.ac.uk](mailto:s.grogan@sheffield.ac.uk)

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**Vice-chair/Secretary:** Jim Ewing,  
[7823561E@student.gla.ac.uk](mailto:7823561E@student.gla.ac.uk)  
**Treasurer:** Stuart Purdie, [sdjp@st-andrews.ac.uk](mailto:sdjp@st-andrews.ac.uk)

### Welsh Subcommittee:

**Chair:** David Manning, [manningdj@cardiff.ac.uk](mailto:manningdj@cardiff.ac.uk)  
**Vice-chair/Secretary:** Vacant  
**Treasurer:** Natasha Hirst, [natashahirst@yahoo.com](mailto:natashahirst@yahoo.com)

### Finance Subcommittee:

Tim Roll-Pickering, Stuart Purdie, Natasha Hirst, Martin Gough, Tim Brown, Chris Neville-Smith, James Groves. One position vacant.

### Constitutional Subcommittee:

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

## Affiliations for the year 2002-2003 at time of going to print:

Aberdeen	London Institute
Anglia	LSE (new)
Aston	Manchester
Bath	Nottingham
Bristol	Open University (new)
Cardiff	Oxford
Coventry	Queen Margaret
Cranfield, Cranfield	Sheffield (new)
Durham	St. Andrews
Edinburgh (new)	Surrey
Essex	Sussex
Glasgow	Swansea
Gloucestershire	UCL
Hull	UMIST (new)
Imperial	Warwick
Institute of Education	Wolverhampton
Kent	Worcester
Lancaster	York
Leeds	

*Further affiliations for 2002-2003 still to be confirmed.*

### Affiliated recognised bodies:

The Mature Students' Union  
The National Union of Students  
Council for International Students (CIS)

### Associated bodies:

National Union of Students (NUS) special regions - NUS Scotland, NUS Wales and NUS-USI Northern Ireland  
Coalition for Higher Education Students in Scotland (CHESS)  
UK Council for Graduate Education (UKCGE)