

The Effect of Top-Up Fees on Scottish Students

The Higher Education Bill will potentially have an adverse effect on Students in Scotland according to the Scottish Parliament's Enterprise and Culture Committees Report "Scottish Solutions". It recommended that the Scottish Executive put more money into Higher Education and that Universities should get financial assistance from the business community. According to the Scotland on Sunday under the UK government's proposals Scottish Students will not give special assistance to those who wish to go to English Universities; the £1.5bn loan will apply to English students only. Furthermore it is stated that unless the Scottish Executive agrees to fill the breach for Scottish students travelling to England, they will be forced to pay up prior to starting courses each year. The article also states

that sources with the Scottish Executive hinted that ministers will be unwilling to pay the loan for Scottish Students. This will have a knock on effect by put off undergraduates from doing postgraduate courses outside due to the burden of debt incurred.

Another major concern is how the concentration of research funding will add to the problem of many Scottish higher education institutions reducing their funding. With the attractiveness of higher education institutions in England with significantly higher funding, there is a potential problem that staff will be lost so that resources will be heavily deflated. This will significantly impact the future opportunities for postgraduates in Scotland, which NPC Scotland has raised its concerns about.

Student Complaints Review Hits Scotland Too

For a number of years, NPC has been endlessly campaigning for fair, transparent, consistent and timely complaints systems across the UK's higher education sector. At present this is far from complete, where in England there still exists a University Visitor system that applies to older pre-92 institutions. In such a scenario, if a student has a complaint that is not resolved by the University, rather than go to the courts, they must petition the Visitor. Their Visitor may be the Queen, the Archbishop of Canterbury, Lady Warnock of Weekes, Lady Archer or some other prestigious character of similar status. The medieval system that started hundreds of years ago as an Ecclesiastical routine is long outdated and the introduction of the office of the independent adjudicator, due to start

operating in Summer 2004, is welcomed to remove the many problems that exist.

The Scottish Public Services Ombudsman Act 2002 was introduced to act as an arbiter in a number of public services includes education. A consultation has been released by the Scottish Executive, "*A new Complaints Landscape for Further and Higher Education in Scotland*". Some questions are asked about the future of Scotland's higher education complaints system, which will be subject to discussion at the next NPC Scotland meeting. This will be reviewed in light of the serious complaints that occur over disputes between the supervisor and the research student, for which severe litigation can result.

NPC Scotland's Officers

Your NPC Scotland Officers are as follows:

- Chris Stuart, Chair, scotland@npc.org.uk
- Jim Ewing, Vice Chair/Secretary, 7823561E@student.gla.ac.uk
- Vacant, Treasurer

The Treasurer is currently vacant and will be open for elections at the forthcoming NPC Scotland meeting. If you want to see how NPC uses its resources and advise on how it can best use its resources for Scotland, why not give it a go? The post involves being a member of NPC's Financial Subcommittee, which meets once a year in July and other than that discusses any occasional financial matters that arise over email. The post requires little effort but helps ensure that Scotland has a say in how NPC operates its finances. If you would like to know more please email Tim Brown, the General Secretary on npc@npc.org.uk.

Next NPC Scotland Meeting

The Next NPC Scotland Meeting will be at the University of Dundee on Saturday 6th March, kindly hosted by Dundee University Students Association. Details of the actual time and venue will be sent to the NPC Scotland email list. There is a plan for the General Secretary, Tim Brown, to give a presentation on supporting and representing postgraduates for institutions there who have not yet met NPC followed by the formal meeting where we will discuss the report from Scottish Solutions, the current consultation on student complaints in Scotland and other pertinent business.

NPC Scotland's New Website

NPC Scotland has released a new website, <http://www.npc.org.uk/scotland>. This website directory will help centralise and communicate the work that NPC is doing specifically in the interests of Scotland. If there is any further information you would find useful on NPC Scotland's website please email the General Secretary on npc@npc.org.uk.

NPC Scotland Receives Letter from Scotland's First Minister

Having contacted the First Minister and asked the Scottish Parliaments view of Top-Up fees. I was very pleased to get a quick response. Within the letter Mr McConnell stated the following "Mr McConnell was interested to hear about NPC Scotland and has Scottish Executive officials who deal with higher education that are aware of its existence". On Top-Up Fees Mr McConnell states the following "I can assure you that Scotland's devolved government has no plans to introduce top-up fees".

NPC Scotland Email List

Are you on the NPC Scotland email list? NPC has an information list for the UK but also one specifically for Scotland. If you wish to join this list please email the General Secretary on npc@npc.org.uk or visit <http://www.npc.org.uk/jiscmail>.