

**National Postgraduate Committee Conference  
Joining the National Postgraduate Committee**

***What does affiliation give us?***

- The NPC helps in local institution issues giving you a voice when problems surpass local boundaries. There is a compilation of NPC policy responses therefore that can be accessed. [www.npc.org.uk/essentials](http://www.npc.org.uk/essentials)
- They will emphasise PGT as well as PGR and raise awareness in every Higher Education Institute (please see “*Useful findings and suggestions from the conference presentations*”)
- NPC collects and collates data e.g. “General statistics” and “General Information and Advice”.
- It can influence high and low levels of governance e.g. “Future Funding”
- Media and government campaigns e.g. campaigning for continued no council tax for writing up PhDs
- Provide information and ideas from other institutions compiled together e.g. “Future Funding”.
- NPC conferences are a good way of conveying masses of information and generating ideas especially as it brings together student representatives from other institutions in the same boat. Please refer to “*Useful Findings and suggestions postgraduate representatives form other universities*”
- Useful leaflets and flyers were given during the conference regarding study support and funding.
- There is a regular newsletter keeping members informed of NPC activities and there are also regular emails from the NPC organisers (some of which are full-time)
- Costs £632 a year which compared to NUS affiliation is pittance. Leaving University of London will also mean changing regulations for PhD students in terms of hand-in timetables and regulations of binding of theses. Some of these might not be seen to be as beneficial as the current regulations and the NPC can help lobby if this is the case.
- Please refer to the Appendix attached for all headings above and for general information regarding information gleaned in the NPC conference

***My Recommendation***

My recommendation is to join the NPC as it provides many services and will help the DPGS position at its infancy stages. I propose a review of this decision should it be for joining, in another two years to see if it is still needed at that stage.

### *Appendix 1*

#### *Useful findings and suggestions from the conference presentations*

##### **General Statistics**

- The EU government is concerned regarding the levels of females in academia:
  - Female UGs-56%
  - Female PGS-42%, of which 57% are doing life science PhDs
  - 4% of females go into academia from PG study
  - In terms of wages, a woman obtaining a 1<sup>st</sup> is equivalent to a man obtaining a 2:1
  - Women/ethnic minorities are under-represented in research
- 700,000 new researchers required to compete with money put into R and D to compete with South East Asia and North America
- EU targets for R and D is 3% of GDP by 2010 (2.2% at the moment) whereas although £1.25 billion increase in budget for 2004/5, this is going to be 2.4% by 2014 (less than originally planned).
- Government organisations driving more funding are the DTI and the OSI
- It is therefore a good time to be a PG student (encouragement to read the treasury report) but the laggards are industry in terms of funding so these need to be pushed to show them what PGs can do.
- Market motivations for post-graduate study:
  - 67% intended do a PG degree within 2 years or immediately after UG
  - Of these 70% stated it was career driven, 61% personal development and 57% professional development.
  - Costs have a strong influence in the decision to study PT or FT (64%)
  - Lower socio-economic groups are twice as likely to intend PT and live at home and take this into consideration when choosing institution and cost of HEI.
  - Working while studying served an obstacle by 50% of the lower socio-economic group.

##### **General Information and advice**

- Graduate Schools are generally seen to be a good idea as they build a good community spirit. They are also seen as a US model
- Surveys as a general means of gathering information from the student body are good but its also important to make sure that individual features regarding departments are noted and not just overall institutional opinions
- There is no typical postgraduate-there are wide varieties of courses, students, delivery mechanisms of course information and thus a wide variety of problems.
- A new environment and increased work pressure can lead to isolation.
- The new environment needs to be accompanied by explanations and information e.g. plagiarism is seen differently in the UK compared to European HEIs.
- Language and cultural barriers for international students
- Lack of participation should not be confused with lack of interest in representation.
  - Representatives may not be the best way of representing
  - This is because each student has different needs

- Hard to expect student reps to do their job efficiently as they will be busy with their own course. Therefore they need to be given the necessary support (DPGS position, job-sharing, relevant issues delegated) and training (doing practical work).
- There needs to be a mechanism to collect data, if PGs can't make meetings due to unsocial hours regarding their work. Therefore, the GSA website (forum/message board), emails etc can be one of way of doing this (any other ideas?)
- Invite mature UG students to the GSA (possibly membership as they wouldn't have paid capitation)

### **PhD and supervision**

- Any problems related to PhDs can be referred to John Wakeford who holds seminars for students at Euston. [www.johnwakeford.com](http://www.johnwakeford.com) for free advice on PhD problems. [www.missendencentre.co.uk](http://www.missendencentre.co.uk) . One of the interesting pieces of advice he gave was that it would be good for supervisor's to have individual ratings at success of supervising.
- Are student advisors trained specifically in PG issues?
- Are supervisors trained?
- There should be a set out protocol of the student supervisor relationship with a feedback system.
- Supervisor success rate record
- A joint supervision is recommended by QAA (I can vouch that the GSLSM has already thought of this and has approved it)
- Can PhDs access courses that they find useful? This would mean clear layouts of all the optional and compulsory courses and information on how to get on to them (I believe Henri Ozarovsky has been negotiating this with GSEPS, but this needs to be addressed college wide).

### **PhD and income**

- Less employability and wages?
- Not necessarily paid more although 43% seem to think they do and 72% had the perception that PhDs have a positive impact
- PhD students need to be able to sell to employers there transferable skills
  - An ability to work independently
  - Independence of thought
  - Research trained intellect
  - Problem solving skills
  - Communication skills
  - Ability to manage upwards i.e. supervisors being likened to managers in a company
  - High level of maturity
  - Experience of teaching/coaching
- The disadvantages to doing a PhD:
  - Niche market, too specialised
  - Employers are interested but will not commit to additional resources and PhDs are rarely treated differently to UGs
  - The expectations of a PG are too high (e.g. salary premiums)
  - PhD and UG seen as the same market

- Additional skills are not worth paying extra for i.e. not that special
- More and more PhDs applying to graduate schemes so increasing competition
- Increasing competition from Masters students who are equally competent
- Generally researchers are unaware of opportunities available to them as they have a less structured career provision (the GSA hopes to contact more employers to raise awareness about the higher calibre of PhD students and hold careers fairs that are specifically tailored to PG students).

### **Future Funding**

- At the moment sources of funding for research is done via the RAE system (last one in 2007) with a dual support system. This is composed of “Quality Research” funded by HEFCE and pays for infrastructure and academic salary. In addition there is “Project Funding” from charities, research councils and Department of Health. In this system, 35% of the QR from HEFCE goes to only 5 HEIs (Imperial is obviously one of them).
- The new Metric system is being particularly encouraged by government circles who envisage that it will encourage research in all institutions. The problem with this is that not all institutions will not be equipped for that so possibly not sustainable.
- The Metric system (2008 onwards) is such that HEFCE will match the amount of external research income a HEI makes. This external income will come from industry, government departments, research councils, charities and EU.
- This therefore means that the HEIs that are already receiving most of the funding using the RAE system will not suffer but it will mean that a polytechnics stand to benefit from this as a lot do have external funding from industry.
- This form of funding will also be accompanied by assessment of institutions’ adherence to the “Code of Practice” by Quality Assurance Assessment i.e. students only accepted to institutions that are capable of high research quality output

### **PhDs and the future**

- More structured
- Min 4 years
- Treated as early stage researchers
- Increased employability
- Social wage with pensions? This will mean that taxes will have to be paid on albeit better pay
- In the future more international EU supported research groups will be formed with more mobility.
- Many more professions with Professional Doctorates.

### **Masters and the future**

- More research Masters
- Work-based learning and assessment for PGT, MPhil/PhD
- Technology transfer and commercialisation (Imperial Innovations and the Entrepreneurs club are collaborating as well)

- Interdisciplinarity

### **Events/participation/socialising**

- PG sports night/matches
- BBQ
- Networking events
- Interest groups (book club?)
- Pub quiz
- International society
- Family day out
- Cultural days
- Pubs
- Sightseeing
- Third don't drink and others drink only a little
- Have segregated (PG only) and non-segregated (PG + UG) events
- Give grants to undergrad led societies to do grad led events/activities
- Find people who are socially strategically placed to get them on board (facebook suggested)
- Manage expectations i.e. smaller numbers
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### ***Useful findings and suggestions postgraduate representatives from other universities***

- In Cardiff there is an online survey called Project Q. This gathers information first-hand from students about aspects of their life from the minute they enter the university from year 1 through till PhD.
- This can be employed at Imperial using the Bristol on-line survey (site access £500 annually) pilot called Postgraduate Research Experience Survey (PRES). This will be put on the NPC website and then we can download to test.
- Bristol and York have separate PG unions.
- In York, all the PG sabbatical officers are part-time and are actually doing their union work alongside of their research work-this sounds like it forces the sabbatical officers in a position where they are more empathetic to the student body they are representing. It also means that there are no interruptions and repercussions to their career aspirations. These are more likely to adversely affected by a FT sabbatical role than for undergrads as any break is frowned upon once the PG ball is set rolling (by supervisors, HEI employers etc. basically if they wish to carry on in academia)