POSTGRADUATE ISSUES NETWORK

SRHE

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The Postgraduate Issues Network was set up in January 1995 to help its members find out about new developments in the field of postgraduate education and to interpret these for their own use and benefit. In particular the Network is concerned with: policy issues, financial issues, quality issues, epistemological issues, issues of good practice, issues specific to and independent of discipline, for both taught and research degree levels and for the transitions from undergraduate level and into employment.

Report for the year 2009-10

The Network held three open discussion seminars led by invited presenters over the year. We inaugurated the new home of the Society at 44 Bedford Row on 12th November with a talk led by Janet Metcalfe of Vitae and our own Pam Denicolo, **Beyond the JSS: a Development Framework for ALL Researchers**. This introduced the new Researcher Development Framework whilst still in its formative stages, with an open consultation exercise ongoing at the time. Those attending had the chance to input their views on how well the draft framework achieves its purpose, suggestions for how it can be improved, and how the framework could be used within their organisations.

[**Update:**
The Researcher Development Framework (RDF) was officially released in September 2010 and is a new national framework providing researchers of ALL levels with guidance on the knowledge, skills, behaviours and personal qualities the profession and sector have identified as significant for a research career. Based upon extensive research among the academic profession, the framework consists of four core domains, twelve sub-domains and sixty-three descriptors. It extends across five phases of development, from new researchers in training to outstanding and inspirational professionals. It was designed to be flexible and relevant to the full spectrum of researchers and also to meet the needs of all subject areas; inevitably the RDF contains greater depth and detail than was present in the Joint Skills Statement for postgraduate researchers. Introducing such a large and complex framework to researchers and implementing the whole structure within HEIs so as to maximise the benefits are the next big challenges facing the RDF. Following our introductory seminar on the RDF in November 2009 with Janet Metcalfe of Vitae and our own Pam Denicolo, at the annual conference session we will up-date the Network on the RDF, explain the current configuration and discuss how best to use it. We will address some of the key issues emerging from

early encounters with the RDF and invite feedback from the Network, which will help to refine the framework further.]

We waited then until 24th May for **A Debate: Assessment, Accreditation and the Elusive Notion of "Doctorateness". Gill Clarke and Janet Bohrer**, connected with the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education but considering issues more in a personal capacity, led this workshop, which built on recent discussions that have explored the changing nature of doctoral education in the UK and posed some important questions about what we mean by the term doctorateness, the quality that at least in principle all doctoral awards (of all types and in all disciplines) should have in common and all doctoral candidates should be able to demonstrate. The debate, with structured framing through contributions from the Network convenors, drew from some of the challenges of reconciling current modes of assessing doctorates with this developing but elusive notion of doctorateness, including what exactly should be assessed, product or evidence of progress, and questions whether doctorates should be graded and credit-rated.

The final session of the year managed to point us towards the start of the next, with a workshop on **Enhancing Induction of Postgraduate Research Students**, led by Elena Martin, Lowry McComb and Stan Taylor of Durham University. They explained how induction has historically often been conceived primarily in terms of informing students about the nature of the institution they have recently joined, principally its history, geography, structures, policies, procedures, and regulations. While this remains an important purpose, it can be argued that, in an evolving mass graduate education system where students come from very diverse backgrounds and may have very limited previous experience of research itself or of working within a research environment, induction should have a wider range of functions, and attendees debated their perspectives on this. It is this approach which informs the latest Guide in the SRHE series launched at this event and available from September, *Induction of Postgraduate Research Students*.

See the separate report on this series of Guides on **Issues in Postgraduate Education: Management, Teaching and Supervision**, authored by Pam Denicolo. Pam will continue to lead the production of the series but is stepping down formally from the role of convenor of the Network itself and its events. We can hardly express enough appreciation for her efforts from the point when she, Alistair McCulloch and Carolyn Boulter got together to restart the Network in 2003 until now, and we are glad that she is able to continue putting effort into the complementary publication side as well as offering her expertise and assistance informally. We welcome Julie Reeves from Southampton University, and co-worker with Pam on drafting the new Researcher Development Framework, as the new third member of the convenor group.

The next Network event, and the first for 2010-2011, is on 21st September, organised jointly with the Access & Widening Participation Network. Paul Wakeling of the University of York, with a response by Liz Thomas, will lead a discussion on **Widening participation to research degrees**. On the agenda of future meetings to be arranged is a discussion yet on professional doctorates and work based learning in postgraduate education, one on Doctoral Training Centres - what are they and what should they do? - and one on the viva.

The Society's forthcoming annual conference is scheduling sessions in the programme dedicated to each Network, focusing on one or more research topics critical to the nature of each. So we highlight ours, **The Postgraduate Domain: an invitation to discuss the main research issues**. We shall introduce the Postgraduate Issues Network and examine the state of play in the debate on the nature of 'Doctorateness' and on the Researcher Development Framework. We invite you to suggest other topics of interest to you, with a view to setting priorities in organising Network events over the next year or so.

If you cannot make the session and you have an idea for a topic to present or on which to write a new Guide, do get in touch with one of the convenors directly.

previous events (back to 2004)

30 April 2009, Tony Bromley & Robin Humphrey
Evaluating the impact of newer researcher training & development: which direction forward? (joint event with Academic Practice Network & with Vitae Yorks. & N.E. Hub)

21 October 2008 & 2 June 2009
Workshop: presenting your research (joint events with Newer Researchers Network)

23 June 2008, Anne Lee and Stan Taylor
New approaches to postgraduate supervision and supervisor development

23 June 2008, Alistair McCulloch
Power and the part-time research student experience

25 February 2008, Ian Haines
What supervisors need to know about Bologna and beyond

16 October 2007, Rowena Murray and Phyllis Crème
Issues around strategies for writing postgraduate theses

20 June 2007, Chris Park, Becky Francis, Miriam David and Stephen Rowland
Defining the doctorate: what was it? what is it now? and what should it be?

11 May 2007, Ingrid Lunt and Gill Clarke
Implications of the QAA Code of Practice for Professional Doctorates

23 May 2006, John Gibbins and Althea Allison (Central Office for Research Ethics Committees)
Governance and ownership of ethics in research

2 December 2005, Richard Young, Newcastle University & PREMIA
Making research accessible: student issues and strategies for inclusion

21 October 2005, Penny Tinkler and Dr Carolyn Jackson
Examining PhDs

5 May 2005, Howard Green, Stuart Powell and Jim Ewing (National Postgraduate Committee)
Institutional challenges to doctoral education in the UK

14 February 2005, Miriam David
Support of non-traditional research students

3 December 2004, Paul Hubbard, Head of Research Policy at HEFCE
Policy issues surrounding doctoral submission and completion rates

7 June 2004, Alistair McCulloch
The support and training of supervisors in the light of new initiatives and demands

13 May 2004, Gill Clark, QAA
The revised QAA code of practice on postgraduate degree programmes: issues and implementation

Events and Developments Forthcoming

17 March 2011

Vernon Trafford, Exposing the best kept secret in higher education: the viva (see separate flyer)

Summer 2011, Doctoral Training Centres: what are they and what should they do?

The EPSRC launched their Doctoral Training Centres (DTCs) in March 2009 with a view to providing a major injection of funding into postgraduate education and training whilst also creating exciting and innovative communities of research. Over 50 centres have been created by the EPSRC and the ESRC is set to follow with their own DTCs and Doctoral Training Units in 2011. DTCs address some of the key challenges of the 21st century by focusing on specific research areas ('energy' and 'the digital economy' for example) and are underpinned by the idea that solutions to big global problems require a multi-disciplinary approach. By clustering talent around key issues, the DTCs aim to expand the skill set of our scientists and to make the UK a world-leader in important areas. The emphasis on the acquisition of transferable skills and training for a broader context has been a welcome and defining characteristic of the DTCs.

Two years on and with social scientists about to establish a new national network for research, it is timely to reflect on the experience of the existing DTCs and to explore some of the practical issues. Our forthcoming workshop (summer 2011) will search the concept and practices of the DTCs and will review the range of perceived benefits from achieving economies of scale to the personal and psychological benefits to postgraduates. We will take stock of what DTCs are, what they should do and exchange thoughts on what works best.

And…?

- Taught PG programmes, relatively ignored to date (Nicola Reimann, L&T, Northumbria) *****

- We have been lining up seminars on Professional doctorates and work-based learning in postgraduate education, and are likely to return to the question of research ethics at some point.

- We are interested in ways that will involve Network 'members' more continuously, for instance through discussions such as this one or virtually. We have continually encouraged more participation from postgraduate students themselves and are hopeful for some input from representative groups such as the National Postgraduate Committee of the UK.

Issues in Postgraduate Education - SRHE Guides Series

Editorial Team:
Professor Pam Denicolo – Executive Editor
Dr Martin Gough
Professor Alistair McCulloch
Ms Helen Perkins - Director of SRHE

About the Guides
The first series, edited by Pat Cryer, comprised seven Guides and such was their popularity that the hiatus left when Pat retired stimulated many requests for a second series. SRHE established Series Two and launched the first new Guides in 2007. Members of an extensive and eminent Editorial Board help steer the Series and individual members have been invited to contribute as readers of, or provide a Foreword for, specific Guides.

The Guides are designed for supervisors, postgraduate tutors, heads of department, deans, members of committees on postgraduate and research matters, staff developers, student union officers, other technical and academically related staff - in fact anyone who in any way contributes to or is responsible for the support of postgraduate students, as well as for those students themselves. (The Guides may also prove useful for a wider audience, such as managers of funded research teams, in fact, anyone involved in supervising projects at undergraduate level and postgraduate students themselves.)

Guides are based on research and/or reflective practice in a certain area or under a certain theme and have been produced as a short, practical, easy to dip into handbook serving a dual function. They are intended to be helpful to the practice of postgraduate management, teaching, supervision and other aspects of the Guide's theme, and they seek to encourage debate about some of the controversial issues surrounding the theme. The SRHE Postgraduate Issues Network meetings series provided opportunities to inform the development of a some Guides or to launch others following publication.

The Second Series
Between 2007 and June 2010 ten Guides have been published:
1. Research Supervision and the Skills Agenda: Learning Needs Analysis and Personal Development Profiling
2. A Guide for Internal and External Examiners
3. Supervising Disabled Research students
4. Supervising International Research Students
5. The Silent Majority: Meeting the Needs of Part-Time Research Students
6. Supervision Teams: Making them Work
7. Evaluating Training and Development Programmes for Postgraduate and Newer Researchers
8. The Bologna Process and Beyond: Implications for Postgraduate Education
9. Capturing Best Practice in Postgraduate Supervision-taking a fresh look
10. Induction for Postgraduate Research Students

The Future
There exists currently proposals that have undergone scrutiny and review by external editorial team for at least four more titles of current interest to the sector but, like all publically funded institutions, SRHE is reviewing its finances . Thus the Publication Committee has been discussing the Guides, how they might be produced more efficiently and cost effectively, etc. To date, the Guides have been produced as very high quality hard copy and, indeed, some titles of the current Series have sold out. Various options are being explored, including making them available in electronic format or in less expensive paper format. Other ways to increase sales and accessibility are being explored since they are clearly of interest to a wide audience beyond those members of SRHE and its interest networks, as indicated by their acclaim when used to support UKCGE and Vitae workshops. Other Interest Groups are also interested in producing Guides so decisions also have to be made about how many Guides per annum can be considered for support. A fair and rigorous way of selecting from all the various offers and possibilities will then be required.

Professor Pam Denicolo
Director of the Graduate School for the Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences,
The University of Reading.