



UK Council for Graduate Education

10th Anniversary Summer Conference Report A Decade of Graduate Education – Challenges and Opportunities for the Future

Imperial College London
7 – 8 July 2004

The UKCGE Tenth Anniversary Summer Conference was held on the 7 – 8 July 2004 at Imperial College London. Below are some of the highlights from the conference sessions.

KEYNOTE 1

'Key Issues for the Future of Higher Education'

Sir Richard Sykes

Rector, Imperial College London

His talk began with a review of the role of Higher Education in Society in servicing a knowledge based economy and the general state of the sector for meeting this role. The problems associated with the absence of agreement about participation targets; the reducing numbers of students wishing to study key subjects such as maths, physics and engineering leading to closure of Departments; fewer students wishing to pursue a research career; the crumbling 'plant' in many institutions and the view from industry of there being a shortage of people with skills appropriate for the workplace being produced were all highlighted. These difficulties could be seen as leading to the possibility that the tertiary education sector could come act as a substitute for inadequate primary and secondary education. The argument was presented that in order to forestall this possibility there needed to be a fundamental re-evaluation of Institutional missions with a plurality of provision being seen as the way forward. The vision was presented of some Universities servicing primarily local/regional agendas, some focusing on National priorities and some operating in the increasingly competitive International marketplace for Graduate Education.

Professor Malcolm McCrae

UKCGE Executive

KEYNOTE 2

'A Ten Year Retrospective of Graduate Education and Prospects for the Future'

Professor Bob Burgess

Vice Chancellor, University of Leicester

Professor Burgess was a founder member of the UKCGE and indeed its first chairperson. It was therefore particularly apposite that he should be asked to give a keynote address at the centenary conference - looking back through the time of the Council and forward to its future. He recalled that when the council was first mooted, the suggestion that its title should include mention of Graduate Schools was firmly denied on the grounds that the notion of such schools 'would never catch on'. Clearly, much has happened since those days both for the council and

for graduate education in the UK and abroad. Professor Burgess illustrated the significant growth across graduate education and particularly in the area of the taught masters and claimed that those responsible for graduate education could be justifiably proud of some of the gains made in terms of improvements to the quality of delivery of postgraduate programmes – both research and taught. He discussed some of the interesting aspects of the age profiles of categories of postgraduate students and noted that 69.8% of part-time postgraduate students are over 30yrs of age. Clearly, the student base has changed in nature over the time of the Council's existence and therefore the kinds of institutional responses to students' needs and preferences have had to be developed accordingly.

In his address Professor Burgess noted the growth in student numbers as a major collective achievement for the sector and one that had not come easily – related aspects such as the need to increase the student stipend were beginning to come to some kind of satisfactory fruition. Similarly, the need to monitor the way in which research students are supervised and to train their supervisors (and to a lesser extent their examiners) are now commonly accepted where prior to the time of the Council they were not. Over the ten-year period there have been significant strides in terms of the range and kinds of research training offered to students. The sector can claim to have professionalised itself on these counts. The result has been, amongst other things, an improvement in completion rates. He did at this point note a 'sting in the tail' – where the sector may have delivered in terms of full-time research council funded students yet has not always been so successful with part-time, self-funded students.

Having outlined some of the major achievements that have taken place during the time of the Council's existence and in which it may have played a part, Professor Burgess considered some of the key debates that are current in postgraduate education. First he discussed the development from good practice to threshold standards noting that in all respects the postgraduate community needed to be driven by the needs of its own populations and not led by what was deemed suitable for undergraduates. Second, he revisited the topic of submission and completion rates and again stressed the rights of all students. Third he discussed the doctorate and employability – questioning the relationship between the two.

After some discussion of the White Paper Professor Burgess gave some thoughts on the future climate in which UKCGE would need to operate and hopefully contribute. He mentioned: the role and purpose of postgraduate qualifications; the possibility of the professional doctorates in an ever increasing range of subjects; differing modes of programme delivery (including distance and on-line learning); regional and professional collaborations and networks and finally the role of UKCGE. On this last point he expressed pleasure at the way in which UKCGE had developed from those early beginnings ten years ago. Clearly, it has to be an organisation which colleagues in the sector and those from 'outside' interested in the sector turn to for a view; it has to continue to lobby on the important issues of the day and it may need to focus on the increasing range of issues in PGT. The take away message was of an organisation that has had ten successful years and which now faces challenges as complex as those of ten years ago if different in kind.

Professor Stuart Powell
UKCGE Executive

UKCGE Graduate Schools Survey Launch
Professor Diana Woodward, Napier University
Dr Pam Denicolo, University of Reading

The session saw the presentation of the results of a major survey building upon and updating an earlier survey undertaken by the Council in 1994, the results of which were published in 1995. Following an overview of the growth in, and funding and changing nature of, the UK postgraduate population over the last decade, the results of the survey (which produced a 76% response rate) were summarised.

The survey reports that the Graduate School model is now 'the dominant organisational structure for organising postgraduate education' with two-thirds of institutions reporting having established them. There have, however, been developments in that model, with a move in the pre-1992 universities towards devolution to Faculties. There is no single model, although a core set of responsibilities can be identified covering quality assurance, student training, recruitment, appeals and complaints, publicity and information. Over half are responsible for professional doctorates in addition to other research degrees and taught postgraduate programmes.

The basic and most important requirements for Graduate School success are identified in the report. It is crucial that the body should have a clear identity, well-articulated aims and objectives, and its own Head or Dean of the School. This person must be a senior member of the institution's staff. The School should have its own resources and appropriate administrative support is critical. It should have either sole, or at least 'privileged' access to physical facilities, and it should have responsibility for making and implementing policy in its sphere of activity. There should also be some mechanism for ensuring that the School can influence behaviour in services relevant to its activities.

Overall, the report concludes that there is diversity in both structure and culture across the population of Graduate Schools and that, while they have common aims, there is diversity in implementation. Variation between centralised and de-centralised models is explained largely as a function of size. Among the benefits of co-ordinating graduate provision are the economies of scale, the development of centres of expertise in what is an increasingly important area of UK higher education, the increased integration of what can be a fragmented postgraduate student body, and an associated increase in the power of the postgraduate student voice.

It was emphasised that, as with all surveys, this was a snapshot of the situation in 2003-04 but, by drawing on available data, some projections about future trends could be made. It is likely that expansion in student numbers, both home and international, will continue, but that amongst UK-students the average student age may well increase as a result of increasing student debt. There is likely to be an increase in the delivery of postgraduate provision through distance learning, self-study and e-learning. There is likely to be an erosion of the distinction between full and part-time study and also between 'taught' and 'research' as distinct modes of study. The implications of this for Graduate Schools is that they will have to retain the flexibility that has to date characterised them.

Professor Alistair McCulloch
UKCGE Executive

THEME A: GENERIC RESEARCH TRAINING: PLENARY

'Challenges of Generic Research Skills Training – Design, Delivery and Audit'

Professor Richard Balment

University of Manchester

Professor Richard Balment discussed challenges involved in designing, delivering and auditing generic research skills training. He identified the external and internal drivers for change highlighting the likelihood that from 2006 onwards it is likely that the Funding Councils will link old money for PGR training to HEI's meeting minimum threshold standards. The recent merger of Victoria University of Manchester and UMIST was used as a case study for the design, delivery and audit of a new generic research skills training programme. Initially a Skills Training Project Group from across the two institutions was formed to develop a skills training strategy for the new university. This group identified and prioritised the challenges for the design of a skills training programme and set the initial PGR training and development policy incorporating 3 key elements: Training and Development Needs Analysis (TDNA) system; Personal Development Plan (PDP) and Record of Achievement system; and a Training Framework to provide appropriate courses at the most suitable time for each student's needs. For TDNA students assess themselves in the generic competencies they are expected to attain. The competences and level of attainment required are subject to faculty/discipline-specific adjustment and used to prepare a PDP that records agreed goals, plans for achievement and records progress for both skills development and research programme. The PDP system is standardised across the university but tailored to an optimum form/content for each faculty. Delivery of training will form within a university-wide framework delivered in or cross-faculty, with extra-faculty input tailored to discipline-specific needs. Development, evaluation and review of training provision will be carried out centrally to ensure universal best practice, efficient use of time, resources and materials and permit the TNA and PDP systems to be used to feed back on the training offered to students.

Professor Tony Fell

UKCGE Treasurer

THEME A: PARALLEL SESSIONS

'The Research Council's Perspective'

Dr Iain Cameron

EPSERC

Continuing the Generic Research Training theme, Dr Cameron spoke on behalf of the Research Councils, as Chair of the RCUK Postgraduate Training Group.

He cited the influential Roberts Report recommendations of the need for additional funds for stipends for both Council funded Research Students and Post-doctorates, and in particular the need to strengthen training elements. Through recommendations in the "Improving Standards in Research Degree Programmes" report, the Funding and Research Councils' response was that funding should be conditional upon meeting minimum thresholds, a principle which found favour with the Government.

The Joint Research Councils' approach to Research Training brings together a number of elements through the RCUK Postgraduate Training Group, enhancement of the existing UK

Grad Programme, the 2001 Joint Training Skills requirements in preparation for interface with the Funding Councils and Roberts Skills Training funds.

The Roberts funds would be awarded as a single payment to eligible institutions, for Doctoral and Research Assistant training, and require a single annual report from each institution covering all such research council funds, thus permitting their combination and more effective use across institutions.

The sum of £17m available over a period of three years may be used for pump-priming activities, extending existing provision or improving its quality and impact, in generic and transferable skills rather than technical matters. However, in awarding the additional income, as payback the Treasury expects a change of regime. The OST expects to have to justify that the funds are used for training, that strategic decisions have been made by HEIs and that employers report an improvement in skill levels in four to five years' time.

Year one of the timetable for funding commences in Autumn 2004 with the requirement to provide an overall institutional strategy. Key performance and success indicators for outputs and benefits must be identified. In year two, reports against generic sets of indicators must be provided and monitoring continues in year three until "normal business is achieved".

It is expected that institutional outline strategies will benchmark existing provision and include plans for first year doctoral students and outline provision for subsequent years to full uptake. Additionally, they should detail institutional oversight mechanisms, monitoring and evaluation through measurement of student experience and satisfaction, employer satisfaction, and measurement of changes, ways of meeting individual needs through Training Needs Assessment and Personal Development Reviews, accreditation of programmes, improved quality and differentiation between disciplines, and interestingly, comments upon benefits to non-Research Council funded students.

The Research Councils are working together to share best practice and UK Grad will be holding a Skills Training Best Practice workshop in Spring 2005. Reference was made also to the 1999 QAA "Code of Practice for Quality Assurance of Research Programmes" and the revised Code 2004, as a single point of reference for good practice, which proposes three new precepts on training, and delegates were left in no doubt that there will need to be significant work to implement changes from autumn 2004.

Mrs Katherine Ludlow
UKCGE Executive

'Delivering Transferable Skills in Practice'
Dr Jon Turner
University of Edinburgh

Report to follow

Professor Tony Fell
UKCGE Executive

THEME B: WIDENING PARTICIPATION IN DOCTORAL STUDIES: PLENARY

'Equity and Widening Participation in Doctoral Studies'

Professor Diana Leonard

Institute of Education, University of London

Diana Leonard raised a number of important issues about how to change practices within doctoral studies, especially from the point of view of students rather than academics. Putting the point of view of how students undertaking doctoral studies might feel was seen to be very innovative.

In particular she commented upon how UK Grad did not appear to have a strong agenda on equal opportunities, despite their focus on the students and their experiences. There was a very lively debate amongst the participants about research training and equity questions and this balance between teachers and taught.

This was a very successful session for participants as we engaged in a lively and very participative debate, including with colleagues from UK GRAD.

Professor Miriam David

UKCGE Executive

THEME B: SESSION

'Widening Participation in Doctoral Studies'

Professor Louise Morley

Institute of Education, University of London

Professor Louise Morley took up the themes that Diana Leonard had introduced but also referred to more international work, especially in respect of Africa and Malaysia. A considerable debate about both academics and students internationally and globally about developing research quality and the relevant criteria for this.

Professor Miriam David

UKCGE Executive

EARLY SESSIONS

'Withdrawal Rates'

Dr Paul Davies

Bath Spa University College

Most Studies of doctoral students have concentrated on completion rates rather than on those who withdraw from research degrees. Currently HESA data cannot be interrogated to calculate research degree withdrawal rates. This lack of information contrasts very sharply with the availability of information for undergraduate students, where detailed data are available which relate to a range of student characteristics and are used to generate purportedly sophisticated benchmark measurements.

From a relatively limited number of studies of completion rates:

- Rudd and Hatch (quoted in reference 1) found that 81% of PGR students who started in a sample group in 1957 had completed by 1966
- a 1977 Department of Education found a PhD success rate of 66%

- the Swinnerton-Dyer working party found a varied success rate for different areas (SSRC 40% for the 1973 cohort by 1980, SERC 57% from the 1974 cohort by 1980)
- DES in the arts found 58% of the 1972 cohort had gained a PhD by 1982
- a 2001 survey (reference 2) showed a 50% withdrawal rate in the US.

Generally the surveys described above tended to avoid comment on reasons for withdrawal. However, one 1996 paper on the issue (reference 3) which reported on withdrawal rates over a 7 year period found rates of 8% for men and 16% for women with an additional 23% of men and 26% of women still "in progress".

Discussion range around issues such as

- how to measure withdrawal rates, taking account of part-time students who were believed to be more likely to intermit
- how to deal with confidentiality related to withdrawal rates
- how to compare withdrawal rates in institutions with different types of research students (e.g. predominantly full-time 22 to 26 age group compared with mainly part-time, more mature candidates)
- whether rates will increase as even full time PhD students now tend to be somewhat older than in the past
- the need to "weed out" the uncommitted or weak candidate at a very early stage of a research programme
- the general feeling that there is a relatively high withdrawal rate in the first year
- whether intermitting should be used more or less liberally than is currently the case
- how more information could be obtained on this important issue.

References

- 1 Rudd, E. 1985. A new look at postgraduate failure. Open University Press: Milton Keynes.
- 2 Lovitt, B.E. 2001. *Leaving the Ivory Tower*. Rowman and Littlefield: Maryland.
- 3 Booth, A.L. and Satchell, S.E. 1996. British PhD completion rates: some evidence from the 1980's *Higher Education Review* **28 (2)**, 48-56.

Professor Ian Haines
UKCGE Executive

'Coping with the Quality Agenda – an Administrator's Perspective'

Mr Peter Fearnley

University of Sheffield

Following the session given with Mark Wainman (Sheffield Hallam University) at the last Summer Conference, Peter Fearnley updated a select few bleary-eyed delegates attending the interesting 'breakfast' session, on preparations for the QAA Institutional Audit, and the experiences of the audit event.

He rehearsed the new litany of external drivers for quality audit of Research degrees, including the Joint Research Councils' Skills Statement, Roberts SET for Success, and the joint Funding Councils' report "Improving Standards in Research Degree Programmes". Prior to 2003, there had been no focus for postgraduate study in quality audit except for taught programmes via the QAA's TQA process.

The University of Sheffield had been able to adapt its existing internal QA process to PGR programmes, including Annual evaluation and periodic reviews. However, tensions arise from burdens placed on staff resulting in "quality fatigue", the previous relative autonomy of research supervisors, and in meeting the increasing expectations of students and sponsors. Tensions also arise in the Administrator's dual-faceted role with QAA, being both internal Policeman and external Ambassador.

Peter Fearnley confessed that despite the intention of QAA's 'light touch' approach, during preparation for audit this did not seem to be the case. A University Steering Group (including departments in later stages) devised a project plan including QAA milestones, with dedicated University-wide administrative resources, and use was made of valuable internal networks of audit-experienced staff, to anticipate QAA issues for incorporation in the Self Evaluation Document (SED). Multiple meetings of different constituencies ensued.

A key component of preparation was involvement of Postgraduate Research Students and the Students' Union, which together with the inclusion of PGR issues as a separate section of the SED, helped to focus the audit panel's discussions with Supervisors and Students. The section placed a different perspective on headings used elsewhere. Review of programme approval processes included the New Route PhD and D.Med.Sci. which, being developed from other programmes, helped to show how weaknesses had been addressed.

Delegates enquired about specific issues raised such as skills training for part-time and distance learning students provided via remote support and on-line material, and the provision of facilities, where there was still work in progress.

Internal benefits accrued in the encouragement for reflection, the involvement of students, support for internal QA activities, putting PGR issues on the agenda, positive feedback and constructive criticism, plus the opportunity to follow-up issues which required attention. However, the process does not end with the QAA Audit report. There are new challenges to be addressed including new standards for PGR places and funding, potential for increased external monitoring, student choice and recruitment, emphasis of consortia for delivery of research training, and independent adjudication. Additionally, the Roberts review, new forms of doctoral degrees, the blurring of the boundaries between PGT and PGR, impact of top-up fees, and the Bologna debate, provide problems to be addressed, and the University is keen to capitalise on the momentum of research student involvement in future.

Mrs Katherine Ludlow
UKCGE Executive

'Presentation and Demonstration of the Research Management System (RMS)'

Miss Clare Holdcroft

Professor Peter Gilroy

Manchester Metropolitan University

The session provided an introduction to the Research Management System (RMS) recently developed at Manchester Metropolitan University. The RMS is a central database management system, including an easy-to-use menu-driven front-end. It was originally developed to provide

a single institution-wide database on which to record academics' research activity, but it has been readily expanded to accommodate data on research students also.

The advantages of the RMS for managing research student data were elaborated during the session. These focused on the relative ease of maintaining up-to-date and accurate records centrally, and its usefulness in sharing information across Departments and in eliminating duplication of effort.

The presentation also described some of the detail of the system to illustrate how information was organised and how it could be used. For example, the RMS is able to accommodate all information from the central administration's student database (on registration status, enrolment dates, annual review dates), along with information on the supervisory team, information on the examination (viva date, examiners' names), and so on. The information can be readily retrieved by Departments or Faculties to inform standard letters, for example, or to provide summary data on supervision loads or completion rates, say. Further, because the RMS also includes information on academic staff, the information can be used to provide research groupings of academic staff and research students.

Discussion focused on the adaptability of the system and the possibility of extending it to allow students to enter data themselves to provide a supervision log, in the same way as research outputs are currently entered by staff (eg. date, title of session, and 100-word synopsis/abstract of the supervisee's understanding of what was discussed in each supervision). The scope for accommodating Personal Development Plans within the system was also discussed.

Some of the technical details of the system were discussed (e.g. the system uses TARDIS and runs on ORACLE). The speakers invited interested parties to consider whether the RMS might be useful in their own Departments and, if so, encouraged them to contact the speakers.

Professor Kevin Lee
UKCGE Executive

'Research Training in the Healthcare Professions'
Professor David Baxter
University of Ulster

As with many other areas, the 2001 RAE led to discussions in the Healthcare Professions as to current research capacities in the field, the kinds of research training that are appropriate in those professions and the importance of different methodologies. In this breakfast session Professor David Baxter explored these issues in terms of the UKCGE Working Group's findings and recommendations and in the context of the perceived need for more investment in order to maintain the improvements that had occurred since the previous RAE and the need for research training to be integrated within individuals' career development opportunities. Clearly, the area under consideration had made significant advances over the period of the three RAEs yet on the back of very low numbers of academics submitted (taking Education as a benchmark).

The UKCGE Working Group (UKCGE, 2003) reviewed the current initiatives, sought to identify good practice and then recommended models for (i) research training, (ii) funding and (iii) collaboration. Professor Baxter described the way in which research training needed to become

a national priority not only for HEIs but also for the National Health Service (NHS) and other stakeholders and in so doing he called for a review of research training provision. He also discussed the role of the awards of Masters in Clinical Research (MClinRes), the PhD and the relevant professional doctorates. He compared the MCLinRes with the MRes and stressed that the MCLinRes needed to cover clinical research techniques (both quantitative and qualitative) and epidemiology as well as topics such as governance and ethics. It also needed to take cognisance of the national move to incorporate generic research skills. The overall aim of this degree (and the professional doctorates that might follow it) is to develop further, evidence-based practice in healthcare.

Professor Baxter then ended the session by giving his vision of two parallel career paths for nurses. Both began with a BSc in Nursing. One then followed clinical practice through specialist practitioner status and study for an MCLinRes and subsequent advanced practice modules to a DNSc and consultant nurse status. The other career path followed study for an MRes award and subsequently for a PhD; in this pathway there would follow a period of clinical practice and post-doctoral work in a research and development post within the NHS which might lead to a lectureship and a post directing the research of others. The point of describing the two indicative pathways was to illustrate the options open to nurses progressing through careers inevitably linked with research. Clearly, if the future of the NHS is to be an effective and progressive one then it requires a workforce skilled in research and one that has flexible career paths open to it. Such flexibility requires collaboration between the NHS and Higher Education and between the numerous statutory and professional bodies research councils and industry. The take away message from the presentation and the subsequent discussion was that all stakeholders (professions, practitioners, managers and policy-makers) need to recognise the importance of research skills training in the healthcare professions.

Reference

UKCGE (2003) *Research Training in the Healthcare Professions* Lichfield, UKCGE (ISBN: 0-9543915-0-0)

Professor Stuart Powell
UKCGE Executive

KEYNOTE 3

'The American Doctorate – Present and Future'

Dr Maresi Nerad

University of Washington

Professor Nerad's talk covered the four following themes, general information about the US doctoral system, the past 15 years of doctoral education, current national initiatives and finally some of the challenges facing US doctoral education. The talk began by emphasising that the US doctorate is primarily intended to provide a replacement for faculty although less than 50% have achieved that goal after 10 years.

The production of doctorates has grown significantly to approximately 40,000 per annum at present and this trend is reflected across the disciplines. The proportion of women receiving doctorates has risen from 13% in 1970 to 44% in 2000. Within this, overseas candidates have shown similar trends until the last two years when there has been a significant decline. Age at

completion is high, reflecting in part the different approach to doctoral study with median ages at completion between 30 and 44 depending on the discipline.

Professor Nerad then outlined a series of criticism of the US system, many of which resonate with current developments in the UK. These included:

- the training of doctoral students is too narrow;
- the lack of key professional skills such as organisational and management skills;
- candidates are ill prepared to teach;
- time to completion is too long and many do not ever complete;
- too long a period between PhD completion and stable employment.

In a fascinating analysis of career tracks and family history, Professor Nerad highlighted how women are significantly disadvantaged at the point at which they have children. She suggested that institutions should consider the 'family' in the context of recruiting high quality staff and noted that people with doctorates tend to partner doctorates hence creating potential tensions in the management of two careers – referred to as spousal hiring policy.

Finally Professor Nerad highlighted some of the many challenges facing US doctoral education including, sustaining innovative interdisciplinary programmes, integrating IT and professional development into the curriculum, managing the sharp reduction in international student applications, engaging US doctoral students internationally, attracting excellent young faculty and finally overcoming resistance of faculty to change.

In the lively discussion which followed delegates were keen to hear that the US had similar problems to the UK and that the grass was not greener across the Atlantic.

Professor Howard Green
UKCGE Chair

THEME C: SUPPORTING INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS: PLENARY

'The Changing Pattern of Demand for Postgraduate Education by International Students'

Dr Neil Kemp

British Council

This session began with an overview of the current situation in the UK regarding numbers and countries of origin of both undergraduate and postgraduate (PG). While Greece, the US and China provide the largest numbers of research (PGR) students, China, Greece and India top the league regarding taught (PGT) postgraduates. Huge growth was reported in student demand from China, with increasing demand from Nigeria and Ghana, and a resurgence in interest from Malaysia following a number of static years. The importance of international postgraduate students to UK higher education (and also the UK economy) was emphasised, not least because many pay full fees. There are significant differences in choice of subject between PGR and PGT. In PGR, education and the sciences (including computing) head the list. In PGT, business studies students outnumber those in any other single subject by at least three to one. Other popular topics are computing, management, finance and education.

Dr Kemp presented the results of a study undertaken in collaboration between The British Council, Universities UK and IDP Australia (*Vision 2020*). This study provides a forecast of demand for student places from 144 source countries based on economic, demographic and

HE-participation trends, and an analysis of primary attractiveness factors. These are quality, post-qualification employability, affordability, personal security/risk, lifestyle, and education accessibility, with the first two being of over-riding importance as the UK's strongest selling points. Unsurprisingly, the UK's major competitors are identified as the US and Australia although a number of other EU countries are beginning to develop their provision in a significant way.

Over the next 15 years, regional growth for PG demand to the main English-speaking countries is predicted to be strongest in Asia (annual growth rate of 7.8%) followed by Africa (5.2%) and the Middle East (4.2%), with the US and European countries bringing up the rear. There is a potential forecast growth in international PG student demand for UK higher education of up to 8.1% (much of this in PGT), *if the correct strategy is adopted.*

What would such a strategy look like? A number of key points were emphasised, the first of which rests on the observation that breaking into new markets is expensive. The basis of the strategy must be to maintain and develop the UK's existing PG market. The most crucial factor in whether or not that is achieved is Quality, which is the UK's main selling point. The QAA has an international reputation and UK Higher Education is a very strong brand. Research shows that students choose the *country* first and then make a choice of institution. It also indicates that league tables (including the RAE) play an important part in the student's decision-making process. *Vision 20/20* recommends that institutions seek to grow their key markets and develop existing and new products for those markets. The strategy recommended at national level is that global market intelligence should be regularly collected and analysed, that the 'Education UK' brand should be supported, that there should be targeted marketing campaigns, and that links and synergy with other activities should be built. However, the key question is 'who is going to provide the funds for this?' This question remained unanswered and should perhaps be the target of another investigation.

Professor Alistair McCulloch
UKCGE Executive

THEME C: PARALLEL SESSIONS

'The Role of Partnerships in Supporting Distance Learning Students'

Dr Amanda Dowd

University of Warwick

This session was based upon the experiences of Warwick Manufacturing Group (WMG) in developing partnerships in support of its postgraduate distance learning students. WMG is unique in the UK, currently employing some 480 staff, supported by an annual income of c£100M, less than 10% of which is provided by the funding council; the group has almost 5000 individuals on postgraduate and post-experience programmes, with satellite operations throughout the Asia-Pacific rim, China, India and South Africa. The approach to distance learning provision has been the 'travelling teacher' model, using the virtual learning environment to support, rather than replace, face-to-face teaching.

The university does not franchise its degree courses to third parties; however, an important aspect of WMG's success has been the selection, and development, of 'local' partners to support distance learning provision. These partners have typically been higher education institutions, with which long-term relationships have been developed, based upon a clear

division of responsibilities between the partner and WMG. As part of this, the group retains control over key areas such as admission of students, approval of project supervisors, assessment, and award of degrees. All provision is subject to monitoring in accordance with the university's agreed quality assurance procedures. For partners, key responsibilities include providing support for, and monitoring, the local operation of the programme, initial recruitment and selection of potential participants, collection of fees etc, as well as identifying appropriately qualified academic contributors and supervisors, and (where appropriate) contributing to the (local) supervision of students. Additionally, the local partner has an important role in counselling and welfare, and in keeping the University abreast of any problems in respect of complaints and student discipline.

Other important aspects of the WMG approach to distance learning provision include a commitment to ensuring that the quality of experience of students on such programmes (e.g. provision of careers advice, access to welfare support, local provision of library facility through local partners etc), recognition of cultural differences (e.g. in nature of feedback, related to perceptions of 'loss of face'), and organisation of 'local' events (e.g. annual postgraduate conference in Hong Kong for students in engineering).

Professor David Baxter
University of Ulster

'Value Conflicts for International Students'

Françoise Carénas

PhD Student, University of Reading

The session considered how international students cope with UK Higher Education value systems, the difficulties that can potentially arise when these do not coincide with students' own value systems and how this impacts on student performance. To do this, the speaker provided a qualitative overview of the experiences of a number of international students as described in interviews that she had conducted.

The speaker suggested that important aspects of the UKHE value system include, for example, an emphasis on critical thinking, independent learning, and time management. This contrasts with the values of some international students which place greater emphasise on motivation, hard work and accumulating 'social capital' (developing networks, engaging with supervisors and teachers, working with fellow students). The difference in emphasis raises the possibility of conflicts and misunderstandings. For example, the international students' emphasis on relationships can conflict with the UKHE emphasis on time management if a UK academic's wish to have regular time-tabled appointments, planned ahead of time, is judged against a student's perception of a 'good teacher' who would be more approachable. The situation also raises a dilemma for the student: the student can retain her home value system, but possibly at the expense of underperforming in her degree; or she can abandon her home value systems to take on those of UKHE, but may feel estranged when returning home.

The speaker provided various insightful illustrations of the conflicts that can arise for international students and opened the discussion for others to do likewise. It was noted that the characterisation of value systems was difficult. For example, a UK academic who emphasises independent learning could be perceived as unhelpful and distant by one student but liberating by another. But it was argued that, with the increase in student numbers in UKHE and the

additional pressures of the RAE, the sector might have become less sensitive to, and less responsive to, these issues than in the past.

There was broad agreement that any measures to increase awareness of potential value conflicts for international students was to be welcomed and that Graduate Schools could play an important role in this. Academic staff could help by increasing their involvement with students, acting more proactively and taking more responsibility for engaging with students, and increasing contact hours in classes and lectures. Graduate Schools can also help through the promotion of societies, for example, and through policies on graduate accommodation and facilities.

Professor Kevin Lee
UKCGE Executive

'Dilemmas for Supervisors of Overseas Students'

Emeritus Professor Maureen Pope

University of Reading

Professor Maureen Pope discussed the various issues confronting overseas students and their particular needs in terms of support and supervision. It was pointed out that these problems are not always unique to overseas students and many home students bring similar "baggage" with them when they enter postgraduate studies. The overriding issues are English language and religious/cultural diversity. While the institution will normally have in place mechanisms to support the former, the latter can be more problematic. Intellectually and socially it is often the case that overseas students are reluctant to "argue and debate" in the traditional spirit of postgraduate scholarship at British HEI's. It was agreed that both generic and discipline specific solutions exist to these problems and that particular sensitivity is required around the assessment and provision of skills training needs for these students. While there are arguments for trying to suppress differences by creating a "cultural melting pot", we should perhaps be more willing to help students preserve cultural identities, especially when they intend to return home once their programme of study is completed. Encouraging overseas students to talk about their work and interests can help them overcome linguistic and cultural barriers and provide the confidence required to take maximal advantage of the academic and social opportunities available to them. In so doing we as supervisors and mentors stand to benefit by learning as much from them. Ultimately, there is no one single method and an element of give and take will always be required for resolving each individual's dilemma.

Professor Stephen Hillier
UKCGE Executive

UKCGE Publication – PhD by Published Works

Professor Stuart Powell

University of Hertfordshire

This session launched an update and revision of the Council's 1996 report on PhD's by publication authored by Professor Keith Wilson (UKCGE 1996); the revision being a result of a national survey of regulations governing the award of such degrees in UK HEI's during 2003, to which 80 institutions had responded.

Professor Powell outlined that while the number of PhD's by publication awarded was still very low, compared to 'traditional' PhD's, the new survey suggests that there has been an increase from 1996 in both the number of awards made and the number of HEI's offering the award (though it should be noted that strict comparison with the 1996 report was impossible as the responding HEI's differed to some extent from that report). The actual nature of a PhD by publication varied quite widely, however, with some HEI's requiring a defensive thesis (with the submitted publications) of 3,000 words, while others required a thesis of up to 25,000 words. The distinctiveness of PhD by publication was also blurred in some HEI's who also allowed publications to be incorporated or appended to 'traditional' PhD's. Notwithstanding these differences, it seemed clear that there had been a general increase in the importance of a *critique* (that is a defended position or thesis) as part of the PhD by publication since 1996.

The following changes since 1996 were also highlighted. First, there had been a general broadening of eligibility criteria for such awards, for example making it available to alumni. Second, there had been a general increase in support given to PhD by publication candidates, often by way of formal supervision and/or formal training requirements. It was noted that this might ultimately be a focus for harmonisation with the traditional PhD. Third, it was noted that there was a general increase in the requirement for a *prima facie* case to be made by the candidate prior to an actual examination. The report notes that this is, in effect, a gate-keeping process, although in some cases the *prima facie* case related to eligibility rather than the actual quality of the published work. Fourth, it was noted that the use of external examiners and the viva process were still seen as of high value for such doctorates, and that there had been an overall increase in the use of independent chairs at viva.

Following the launch and summary presentation by Professor Powell, conference participants debated the difficulties of assessing PhD by publication when submissions consisted of multi-authored papers, with the general comment being made that most HEI's required candidates to clearly articulate their individual contribution to such works. Further debate centred on the problem of defining the boundaries of the term 'published work' and how this might affect submissions under such a category from colleagues in the practice-based disciplines.

References

UKCGE (1996) *The Award of The Degree of PhD on the Basis of Published Work in the UK*. Lichfield: UKCGE (ISBN 0 952 5751 1 6)

Dr Paul Davies
UKCGE Executive