

External Pressures on Teaching: Three Years on

Information Article

George MacDonald Ross

Director

Subject Centre for Philosophical and Religious Studies
Higher Education Academy

In August 2001, I wrote an information article called ‘External Pressures on Teaching’, which was published in the then *PRS-LTSN Journal*, 1.2, Winter 2002, pp. 98–129. It is now time to update that article, and to add a number of subsequent developments. However, the original article, which explains the logic of the various QAA initiatives, is still valid apart from some points of detail that I shall highlight here. It is available on our website at:

<http://www.prs-ltsn.ac.uk/journal/index.html#1.2>

I. Updates to the original article

I.1. QAA Review

Institutional reviews have gone ahead under the new system. In England, they include subject reviews of about 10% of departments. As far as I am aware, no PRS departments have yet been selected for

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subject review, because they were among the last to be reviewed under the old system. The assumption is that subjects will be regularly and thoroughly reviewed through each institution's own quality assurance mechanisms, so that the QAA reviews are an audit trail to check that those mechanisms are operating satisfactorily.

As originally thought, there is evidence that internal reviews are sometimes more burdensome and prescriptive than the QAA intended. I have attended a number of meetings with QAA officials, and they are seriously concerned that their codes of practice, subject benchmark statements, and other such documents, are being interpreted as legally and universally binding. However, they insist that the codes are merely exemplars of good practice, and that institutions and/or subject areas are free to deviate from them if they have good reason to do so.

To give just one example, the QAA documentation makes it clear that it is good practice to make a sharp differentiation between the standards expected of students at level 2 and at level 3, and hence that it is not good practice for one and the same module to be available to students at both levels. However, there may be other, perfectly acceptable, reasons for doing just this (e.g. that a programme is designed with more emphasis on breadth than on progression, or that it is the only way for a small department to provide sufficient optionality); and it is in any case possible to conform to the guidelines by assessing students differently at different levels.

The fact that in the QAA subject review some departments were penalised for mixed-level teaching and others were not reveals more about inconsistencies between review panels than about QAA policies. Where departments are under pressure from their own institutions to change their practices on the grounds that the changes are required by the QAA, they should resist if there are sound educational grounds for retaining the status quo.

In Scotland, QAA subject reviews have been replaced by a series of 'quality enhancement themes', the idea being that time and money are better spent on raising awareness of good practice than on double-checking internal subject reviews. The themes for 2003/04 were *assessment* and *responding to student needs*, and those for 2004/05 are *employability* and *flexible delivery*. The outcomes of the

first two themes will be disseminated within the near future—see the Scottish quality enhancement themes website at:

<http://www.qaa.ac.uk/scottishenhancement/>

1.2. Teaching Quality Information (TQI)

When the decision was made to replace QAA subject review with a ‘lighter touch’, it was decided that there still needed to be public information about teaching quality in the light of the discontinuation of published subject reports. A Task Group was set up under Prof. Sir Ron Cooke, and it produced its final report in March 2002: HEFCE 02/15, *Information on quality and standards in higher education: final report of the task group*, at:

http://www.hefce.ac.uk/Pubs/hefce/2002/02_15.htm

Since then the approach the Group recommended has been piloted, and after widespread consultation, in October 2003 the HEFCE published 03/51, *Information on quality and standards in higher education: final guidance*, at:

http://www.hefce.ac.uk/Pubs/hefce/2003/03_51/

This guidance applies to institutions in England and Northern Ireland. Separate guidance will be issued by the Scottish and Welsh funding councils.

The main points of interest at the subject level are as follows:

- The information will be published on a special website at **<http://www.tqi.ac.uk/home/index.cfm>**. It was originally intended that full information would be available from December 2004, but at the time of writing it seems unlikely that this target will be achieved.
- People using the site (in particular, prospective students and employers) will be presented with the information in accordance with the JACS classification of 19 main areas, and they will be

able to drill down to the 141 principal subjects. History and Philosophy of Science, Technology and Medicine is not well served by the JACS system, though Philosophy and Religious Studies are clearly identified as V500 and V600 respectively, under 'Historical and Philosophical Studies'.

- Quantitative data (supplied by HESA) will include entry qualifications, retention rates, degree classes, and employment rates.
- Qualitative information will include summaries of external examiners' reports, summary reports on periodic programme reviews and responses to them, and programme specifications.
- In addition, it is intended to publish the outcomes of a national student survey, which is currently being piloted. However, this particular initiative has run into considerable difficulties, and it seems unlikely that it will be implemented in full in 2004, as planned.

1.3. Benchmark statements

The promised revision of benchmark statements has not yet taken place. However, the QAA has set up procedures for including subjects not previously covered. See:

<http://www.qaa.ac.uk/crntwork/benchmark/consultation/proposed%5Frecognition%5Fscheme.htm>

The statement produced by the history of science community under the leadership of Graeme Gooday of the Subject Centre for PRS is likely to be officially approved. See:

http://www.prs-ltsn.ac.uk/hist_science/events/benchmarking_31.rtf

1.4. Programme specifications

The QAA's intention was that departments would implement a thorough review of their programmes, so that the methods of teaching and assessment in each individual module would be perfectly aligned with the learning outcomes specified for the programme as a whole. This is a perfectly sensible aim, but there is little evidence of its

having been achieved in practice. In general, there seems to have been a culture of compliance, in which departments have gone through a time-consuming process of writing specifications for every programme as it currently stands, without gaining the educational benefit of a more coherent structure. This is a pity, because it reinforces the prejudice that all external pressures are an unnecessary imposition, whereas some of them can in fact be a useful stimulus to increased efficiency and improvements in student learning.

The original proposal in the Dearing Review was that programme specifications would provide useful information for a range of interested parties, such as prospective students, current students, potential employers, and programme reviewers. I have attended a number of workshops on programme specifications organised by the QAA, and the consensus is that these objectives are incompatible—the level of detail and the language in which programme specifications are expressed for review purposes render them of little use for students or employers. Currently there are difficulties in having two supposedly equivalent sets of programme specifications: a detailed one in educational theoretical terms, and a shorter one in more accessible English. This issue remains unresolved.

1.5. Progress Files

By 2005/06, all students (research as well as taught) must have the facility for keeping progress files. Time is getting short, but there is still considerable confusion as to what they are for. CHERI (The Centre for Higher Education Research and Information) conducted a study on their implementation: John Brennan and Tarla Shah, *Report on the Implementation of Progress Files*, October 2003, downloadable from:

<http://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/progressfiles/>

The main findings are that:

- Fewer than half of institutions had introduced formal policies on progress files;
- Some make them compulsory, others voluntary;

- Some gear them mainly towards employment, whereas others focus on academic development;
- Some include them in the curriculum, whereas others link them to the personal tutorial system;
- There is more enthusiasm for them in vocational than in non-vocational disciplines;
- Students tend to be sceptical about their value if staff are sceptical;
- There is little evidence of mere compliance—they have generally been introduced only by those who see value in them.

We are building up a collection of progress files used in our disciplines, for anyone to adopt or adapt, and we would welcome further examples. See:

<http://www.prs-ltsn.ac.uk/generic/qualenhance/pdregg.html>

I.6. QAA Code of Practice

The QAA Code of Practice runs to about 200 pages with as many ‘precepts’. In July 2002, the Better Regulation Task Force of the Cabinet Office criticised it for being too long, too inaccessible, and too prescriptive (despite the QAA’s protestations that it was not intended to be prescriptive).¹ The QAA has now begun the lengthy task of shortening and simplifying the Code.

I.7. Research Assessment Exercise 2008

Publications on subject-specific educational research were eligible for inclusion in RAE 2001; but, as far as I am aware, none were submitted in PRS disciplines. This may have been because there was no suitable forum before we started publishing *Discourse*, or because of a widespread suspicion that they would not carry the same weight as other research publications.

¹ See the report by Phil Baty in the *Times Higher Education Supplement* of 16 July 2004.

Educational publications will again be eligible in RAE 2008. In order to demonstrate that they will be taken seriously, the HEFCE is ensuring that each disciplinary sub-panel has at least one member who has expertise in educational research as well as a reputation for subject research; or, if no such person can be identified, that someone with subject-specific educational expertise is appointed as a specialist adviser to the sub-panel. It is up to institutions to decide whether individual publications should be submitted to the subject sub-panel or to the Education panel. As a rule of thumb, they should go to the subject sub-panel if they involve subject-specific issues beyond the competence of a general educationalist—for example, a paper on the most appropriate system of logic for teaching first-year students, or on approaches to teaching Biblical languages. If, on the other hand, they are publications on generic educational issues, which just happen to have been written by someone outside an education department, then they should be submitted to the Education panel.

Arrangements for dealing with subject-specific educational research publications are still very sketchy;² but when the sub-panels have been appointed, one of their first tasks will be to draw up assessment criteria, and the Higher Education Academy (see below) has been invited to advise on the criteria for assessing educational publications.

2. The TQEC Report and the Higher Education Academy

A Teaching Quality Enhancement Committee was set up to make recommendations for reducing the proliferation of agencies concerned with the improvement of the quality of teaching in higher education. It reported in January 2003,³ and its main recommendations have

² See paragraph 15 of RAE 03/2004: *Units of Assessment and Recruitment of Panel Members*, July 2004, downloadable from <http://www.rae.ac.uk/pubs/2004/03/> .

³ *Final Report of the TQEC on the Future Needs and Support for Quality Enhancement of Learning and Teaching in Higher Education*, downloadable from <http://www.hefce.ac.uk/learning/TQEC/final.doc> .

already been put into effect. There is now a Higher Education Academy, based at York, which brings together the former Learning and Teaching Support Network, the Institute for Learning and Teaching in Higher Education, and the TQEF National Co-ordination Team. It is a charity owned by Universities UK and the Standing Conference of Principals, and it is funded by the funding councils, HEIs, and the individual subscriptions of registered practitioners (formerly members of the ILTHE). Its mission is to improve the quality of the student learning experience, and when it is fully up and running, its detailed policies will be determined by its members, and not by extraneous forces. For further details, see its website at:

<http://www.heacademy.ac.uk>

So far subject centres have been unaffected by the change, except that there has been an increase in funding to enable us to take on additional responsibilities. The operation of the subject centres is currently under review, but we do not anticipate any major changes. There is a clear commitment to the Academy as a permanent institution, and it will occupy its own purpose-built premises at York early in 2005.

There have been some worries as to whether the supportive role of the subject centre network might be affected by a closer relationship with the accrediting role of the former ILTHE. However, we do not see this as a problem, since the two functions are kept entirely separate within the Academy and accreditation is limited to PGCertHE programmes.

3. The White Paper

In January 2003, the Government published its White Paper: *The Future of Higher Education*, downloadable from:

<http://www.dfes.gov.uk/hegateway/uploads/White%20Pape.pdf>

See also my review at:

<http://www.prs-itsn.ac.uk/generic/qualenhance/whitepaper.html>

The White Paper became law with very little amendment, and with very little discussion apart from the issues of top-up fees and the Office for Fair Access. Many of the proposals were poorly thought through, and the funding councils and other agencies, such as Universities UK, SCoP, and the Academy, have been left to turn them into workable policies. I shall briefly discuss the policies that are likely to have most impact on PRS teachers and departments. Although the Act applies directly only to England and Northern Ireland, there will be some knock-on effects for institutions in Scotland and Wales (particularly those aspects with funding implications).

3.1. The separation of teaching and research (§§2.7, 4.31, 4.33)

The separation of teaching and research is one of the few areas in which the White Paper was based on research findings. It used an article by Hattie and Marsh to support the White Paper's claim that there is no correlation between quality of teaching and research activity. Both the interpretation of the article and the claim are contested. On the one hand, it seems plausible to suppose that teachers who are not themselves research-active are unlikely to be good at training up the next generation of researchers, or at keeping their courses up to date. On the other hand, staff whose primary interest is in research may neglect their teaching (or have no contact with undergraduates at all), and talk above the heads of their students. There is at least a consensus that it would be a good thing if teaching were fruitfully informed by research, and the Academy has commissioned research into ways in which the linkage between teaching and research can be strengthened.

However, the issue is more one of politics and economics than of educational theory. The Government seems to have a number of aims:

- It wants the UK to retain its status as punching above its weight in terms of internationally acclaimed research, and it believes that

this is possible only if resources are concentrated in a small number of institutions.

- It wants 50% of 18–30-year-olds to experience higher education by 2010 at the minimum extra cost to the Treasury. This is an uphill struggle because the number of 18-year-olds will steadily rise until 2010, and then decline again (a demographic fact not often noted); and the number of 18-year-olds with two A-levels is less than 50% of the cohort—and even the number with five GCSE passes at grade C or above is little higher. One solution is to encourage large industrial corporations, or public bodies such as the NHS, to turn their training arms into teaching-only universities, thus by-passing the traditional stress on academic entry qualifications.
- Given its free-market orientation, the Government probably sees teaching-only universities, whether for-profit or not-for-profit, as cheap and healthy competition for traditional universities, which are slow to change.

Against this it has been argued that:

- The case for concentration of resources applies only (if at all) to resource-intensive disciplines, and not to disciplines such as ours, where the main requirement for the lone scholar is *time*.
- Low-rated departments are constantly striving to improve their ratings—often successfully. These departments provide the seed-corn for new centres of international excellence, or for new recruits to existing centres. If they are deprived of research funding, there is a serious danger that existing centres of excellence will stagnate.
- The White Paper registers a marked shift from the European model of higher education, in which research activity is definitive of a university, and most universities are state-controlled, to an American model, in which there is much greater diversity between public and private institutions, and between research and non-research institutions. There is a serious question whether the Government's fixation with teaching-only universities and two-year foundation degrees will be compatible with the Bologna process towards harmonisation of European degrees by 2010. The

White Paper focuses exclusively on comparisons with the US, and it pays no attention whatever to the European context. (However, Charles Clarke has recognised this shortcoming, and he has promised a statement on the international dimension of HE in November 2004.)

3.2. Employability skills (§3.23)

There is a clear statement that the HEFCE will work to integrate ‘the skills and attributes which employers need, such as communication, enterprise and working with others’ into HE courses in every subject. Although it might at first seem that this would be more difficult in non-vocational disciplines such as ours, we already foster many skills which are highly valued by potential employers of our graduates, and the main need is not to do things we are not already doing, but rather for both staff and students to articulate employment-related skills more explicitly. We hope that our new employability guides and case studies will be helpful in this respect. See:

<http://www.prs-ltsn.ac.uk/employ/>

3.3. Honours classification system (§4.10)

Worried about grade inflation, the White Paper asks the HEFCE to review the honours classification system (1st, 2.1, 2.2, etc.), but without suggesting any alternative. We may end up with something like the American grade point average. However, it is difficult to see how a more finely-tuned classification system will address the problem of grade inflation (if it *is* a problem—perhaps our teaching and students’ capacity to learn are steadily improving). Nevertheless, there are good grounds for moving towards a grading system that gives more information about graduates’ strengths (including detailed transcripts).

3.4. Professional standards and staff development (§§4.14)

The White Paper delegates to the Academy the task of defining a set of professional standards by 2004–05. By these it means ‘competences

required for all teaching staff'. The process has already begun; but so far it has yielded no consensus as to what these standards should look like. Candidates vary from general ethical principles (like codes of conduct in other professions) to lists of specific teaching skills, such as delivering a lecture clearly, or conducting a discussion group. Part of the problem is that different skills are needed in different disciplines (for example, philosophers and theologians do not need to know about laboratory safety regulations), and different skills are appropriate to different teaching styles. Although I have been involved in discussions, it is unclear what the final result will be, or whether it will be produced before the end of 2004–05. The issue is further complicated by the setting up of a Sector Skills Council for Lifelong Learning in 2004, which has an overlapping remit. It is likely that the Skills Council will commission the Academy to work on skills for teachers and researchers in HE.

Once the professional standards have been defined, institutions will have to ensure that their training programmes for new staff deliver those standards. From 2006, it will be compulsory for all new staff to obtain an accredited teaching qualification (I assume this is what is meant by 'it is expected that . . .'). Nor will existing staff escape, since 'We also expect that institutions will develop policies and systems to ensure that all staff are engaged in continuing professional development to maintain, develop and update their skills'.

It is a common complaint that courses provided by educational development units are too generic, and fail to address the everyday teaching problems faced by teachers within their own disciplines or sub-disciplines. The Subject Centre for PRS is therefore developing subject-specific materials, which can be used in association with, or as part of, courses for new staff. As far as existing staff are concerned, it is almost certain that institutions will accept attendance at events organised by the Subject Centre, or contributions towards its activities (such as researching and writing about teaching issues), as counting towards continuing professional development.

3.5. External examiners (§4.16)

The White Paper notes the lack of training and support for external examiners, whom it sees as key to the maintenance of consistent standards across the sector. The Academy was given the task of producing recommendations to be put in place by 2004–05. Its final *Report and Action Plan, a Guide for Busy Academics*, and other related documents can be downloaded from:

<http://www.ltsn.ac.uk/genericcentre/index.asp?id=21232>

To facilitate networking among external examiners, the Academy has set up an email discussion list, which can be joined at:

<http://www.ltsn.ac.uk/genericcentre/index.asp?docid=21237>

The project has been concerned all along to minimise any new burdens on external examiners, and to increase the supply of people willing and qualified to offer their services. The Subject Centre intends to set up a database of actual and potential examiners, in order to make it easier for departments to find replacements.

3.6. Rewards for good teaching (§§4.17ff.)

The White Paper announces three measures for rewarding excellence in teaching:

3.6.1. Human resource strategies

Institutions will be given extra funding if they have in place robust strategies for rewarding and promoting staff for excellence in teaching, and not just in research. As American experience shows, it is not easy to develop fair and transparent criteria for assessing the quality of teaching, and one of the tasks the Academy has taken upon itself is to draw up some guidelines. These will relate closely to the definition of professional standards (see §3.4, above).

3.6.2. National Teaching Fellowships

Each year there has been a national competition for 20 fellowships worth £50k each to enable holders to undertake a teaching project of their own choice. This number is to be increased to 50. So far none

have been awarded to teachers of PRS disciplines. We strongly urge colleagues with a good track record in teaching to apply and can offer supporting advice where appropriate.

3.6.3. Centres for Excellence in Teaching and Learning (CETLs)

Teams of teachers who can demonstrate excellence were invited to bid for sums of up to £500k p.a. for five years, plus up to £2m in capital funding. For further details, see:

<http://www.prs-ltsn.ac.uk/cetls/>

At the time of writing, six bids involving a significant input from teachers of PRS disciplines had passed the first stage of the bidding process. The outcome of the second stage will be announced in January 2005. Although the original intention (‘written on the back of an envelope’, according to Margaret Hodge, the then Minister for HE) was that most of the money would be spent on financial rewards for staff, the HEFCE has subtly shifted the emphasis towards developing and disseminating good practice. CETLs are required to work closely with the Academy and its subject centres, and we shall do our best to help to ensure that the fixed-term injection of very large sums of money into a small number of departments (there will be about 70 CETLs) will have a beneficial effect, and to support the positive sharing of good practice and related research across departments.

3.7. Fair access (Chapter 6)

The issue of fair access has been sufficiently publicised to need no further elaboration here. The main consequence for PRS departments is that, if the policy is successful, those in pre-1992 institutions will need to develop strategies for getting the best out of students with a wider variety of social backgrounds and educational achievements than before. As always, the Subject Centre for PRS is here to help and we are actively engaged in a number of related projects across the Academy covering such topics as cultural and religious diversity, where there is expertise within the Centre.

3.8. Top-up fees (Chapter 7)

Again, this issue has been publicly aired almost to the exclusion of everything else. It is difficult to predict what the consequences will be for PRS disciplines, but possible knock-on effects include:

- greater difficulty over recruiting students from non-traditional backgrounds (thus potentially undercutting the policy of fair access);
- pressure on prospective students to opt for vocational rather than non-vocational degrees, thus leading to recruitment problems for PRS disciplines (although this may be a false dichotomy, see 3.2. above);
- increasing reluctance of graduates with large debts to proceed to PG programmes;
- more competition between departments at the expense of co-operation in improving the quality of learning and teaching;
- strained relations between those parts of the UK which charge top-up fees and those which do not.

4. Funding for educational research

Large sums of money have been made available for research into improving the quality of education in particular disciplines in HE. However, virtually none of these sources of funding have been tapped by PRS departments. In our disciplines, there were no successful bids, and perhaps no bids at all, for the Teaching and Learning Technology Programme, the Computers in Teaching Initiative, or the ESRC's Teaching and Learning Research Programme.

More recently, the HEFCE's Fund for the Development of Teaching and Learning Phase 5 (FDTL5) was advertised. The original intention was that this source of funding would build on the QAA subject reviews, and disseminate good practice identified in the reviews. However, despite the fact that PRS disciplines did outstandingly well in the reviews, none of the bids were successful.

The Subject Centre for PRS is seriously concerned about the twin problems that teachers in our disciplines rarely apply for funding,

and that they are usually unsuccessful when they do. Unlike most other disciplines, virtually the only subject-specific research into teaching in PRS disciplines is that supported by small grants from the limited resources of the Subject Centre itself. However, a number of other disciplines (especially in the humanities) are in a similar position, and we are joining forces through the Academy to analyse and address the problem. One reason may be that PRS academics and educationalists use different research languages and methodologies, and thus do not always fully recognise the value of the others' contribution.

5. The training of postgraduates

The Arts and Humanities Research Board (AHRB), in preparation for its forthcoming enhanced status as a research council, has been aligning itself more closely with the existing research councils. In particular, it has adopted the policy of requiring award holders to receive training in research skills, and in more general skills relevant to employment, whether in academia or not. The policy was first implemented in 2004, with a distinctly light touch. Its requirements may become more stringent in future.

At one time there was talk of setting a minimum size for postgraduate schools, in order that research students would have the experience of intellectual engagement with others working in the same area. Fortunately the research councils drew back from this idea. Instead, the AHRB invited bids of up to £10k to pump-prime collaboration between departments in the provision of specialised training. At the time of writing, we do not know how many bids were submitted by PRS departments, nor how many were successful. The Subject Centre made two, initially unsuccessful, bids for much larger sums to promote collaboration at a national level and we are currently exploring ways to enhance our applications next year by working with departments to build a co-ordinated programme with national 'reach' in 2005 and beyond.

6. Employment Equality Regulations

The Employment Equality (Religion or Belief) Regulations 2003 came into effect on 2nd December 2003. They can be downloaded from:

<http://www.hmso.gov.uk/si/si2003/20031660.htm>

There is a separate pamphlet for HE published by the Equality Challenge Unit: *Implementing the New Regulations against Discrimination: Practical Guidance*. It can be downloaded from:

<http://www.ecu.ac.uk/publications/downloads/SO+RBguide.pdf>

This pamphlet also covers similar legislation against discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation, which came into force at the same time.

ACAS have also produced a very informative guide to the Regulations, with a number of very useful examples of how they may be applied. These can be found at:

http://www.acas.org.uk/publications/pdf/guide_religionB.pdf

and:

http://www.acas.org.uk/publications/pdf/guide_sexualO.pdf

The reason for mentioning the regulations here is because they may have implications for the teaching of our disciplines in particular. One of the effects of the Regulations is to make it illegal to cause offence to anyone at their place of work in respect of their religious or similar philosophical beliefs. Regulation 20 makes it clear that the Regulations apply to students in higher education, although the examples it gives are restricted to issues such as admissions and access to benefits, and it is unclear whether they cover students being caused offence in the course of their learning. If they do—and only case law can settle the matter—there might be serious difficulties over the handling of sensitive issues in religion and philosophy. As academics, it is part of our function to get students to examine their

deepest held beliefs, and many of them find this process very disturbing. The Subject Centre for PRS is playing a leading role in raising awareness of this and similar issues across the Academy, and it will shortly be publishing a series of faith guides to help academics across all disciplines.

Religious equality is closely related to racial equality, which has already been covered in the Race Relations Amendment Act 2000. Universities Scotland has applied to the Scottish Higher Education Funding Council for funding to develop a race and religion audit tool for the HE sector. The application takes it for granted that the legislation applies to curriculum content and delivery, since the whole purpose of the audit tool is to help academics identify racial and religious biases in their teaching.

The project acknowledges its debt to the anti-racist toolkit developed by the Centre for Ethnicity and Racism Studies at the University of Leeds. See

<http://www.leeds.ac.uk/cers/toolkit/toolkit.htm>

Of special interest is §2.2 on Eurocentrism, which claims that concentrating on Western achievements implicitly disparages the achievements of other cultures, and could be deemed racist. The Subject Centre for PRS will report any future developments.

For further information about the Higher Education Academy's Cultural and Religious Diversity Project, which the Subject Centre is currently leading, please see the project's interim report on pp. 77-82 of this issue.

7. Other pressures

There are a number of other ongoing developments which may have implications for PRS disciplines. In particular:

- *The Bologna process to harmonise European degrees by 2010.* So far this has received little attention in the UK, since the biggest changes, such as the introduction of the 3-year Bachelors degree, do not affect the UK. However, the requirement that a Masters

degree should be taught over two years will certainly affect us, as also the detailed implementation of the European Credit Transfer System, which is based on 60 credits for a year's full-time study. See:

http://europa.eu.int/comm/education/programmes/socrates/ec ts_en.html

- *The General Agreement on Trade and Services (GATS)*. Negotiations are proceeding very slowly, but the big question for us is whether the US will succeed in having higher education included within the Agreement. If so, it will mean that any subsidies to state institutions or to students attending them will count as unfair competition to private overseas universities offering higher education in the UK. Either the subsidies will have to be abolished, or the same subsidies will have to be provided to the overseas competitors. The implications of all this could be very far-reaching.
- *E-learning*. Despite the collapse of e-University UK, there are still strong pressures from the Government, the funding councils, and individual institutions to make greater use of computers in teaching. The introduction of e-learning has been very variable across institutions and disciplines, and the Joint Information Systems Committee (JISC) has recently committed over £1m in funding to the Academy and its Subject Centres for projects to research into and enhance the use of computers in the teaching of individual disciplines. The Subject Centre for PRS should be in a position to announce its plans in late 2004.

The Subject Centre will continue to monitor these and other developments, and will provide information and advice through its monthly e-bulletins, its website, and articles such as this one in *Discourse*.