

The First Year of Postgraduate Research Study, by J.M. Welsh,
62pp, Society for Research into Higher Education.
Paperback, £3 (US \$10), SHRE Members £2.25 (US \$8).
1979.

This monograph presents the experiences of a group of students at the University of Aberdeen during their first year of postgraduate study starting in 1975. It intends to 'focus attention on the ways students approach research and the difficulties they encounter' but not to offer solutions (p.1). Despite this most of Chapter 6 is devoted to a discussion on what the university, the department and the student can do to alleviate the problems encountered. The Introduction (Chapter 1) and a pedestrian though occasionally critical literature review occupy the first third of the text. Chapters 4 and 5 (23 pp) contain the body of the work. The rank order of time spent in different activities and the problem of involving the fledgling researcher in written work are considered. The students had many problems which are discussed under the headings of adjustment, intellectual isolation, loneliness, personal difficulties and facilities for study. Chapter 5

examines the role of the supervisor from both sides in the relationship and to the causes of dissatisfaction with supervision.

The book focuses attention on a long neglected tier of the education system, one which provides universities with much of their funding. However, few who have been involved in postgraduate research will find many of the problems unfamiliar or will not have discussed the solutions over tea. That is not to trivialize the findings, for coherent documentation of the problems may itself be sufficient to raise the level of debate. The potential postgraduate student may be disheartened by the range of problems described and the incidence of dissatisfaction but I wonder whether they differ substantially from those encountered by their peer group who do not enter postgraduate studies. The book is not concerned with assessment although it indirectly raises questions of comparability when students, who are limited financially to a course of set length, may spend a year waiting for equipment.

The book leaves me with a fuzzy feeling. Often data are not presented to support the prose and statements are made about significance without any criterion of significance having been established. The author is critical of other work which achieved a response of 'only 62%' (p.8) but is herself reduced to a response of 67% by the end of the first year of study (p.22). Clearly the book is not aimed at the specialist but I can think of few interested young research students or supervisors who would have sufficient inertia not to be deflected by the end of Chapter 2. I do not understand why it was published in this form or at this stage (the log-book is to continue; into the second and then the third year of postgraduate education?). Throughout reading this monograph my blue pencil jerked uncontrollably and I am not encouraged to look up the other thirty-six monographs published by the Society for Research into Higher Education.

*W.F. Humphreys, School of Biological Sciences,
University of Bath.*