

THE PHYCOLOGIST



The Newsletter of the British Phycological Society

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Home page: <http://www.brphycsoc.org/>

Number 62

August 2002

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Editorial

The Daily Telegraph of the 27 July 2002 published a league table of British University Departments based on the assessment, by academics, of their quality, management effectiveness and standard of facilities. These league tables, based on the percentage of departments rated 'excellent', read like the current football premiership, with a premier league, first division, second division, third division and fourth division. There are really no major surprises with the Universities in the premier league although, unlike their football counterpart, it comprises only five 'clubs'. Similarly the ranking of the third division 'clubs' are generally predictable, with a large number from the former polytechnics. There are some exceptions, however, with some of the more established universities cropping up in both the second and third divisions despite a near 50% of departments being ranked as 'excellent'. The Daily Telegraph also identifies a particularly worrying trend, that student applications last year broadly reflected these rankings, with universities in the top divisions experiencing an increase in applications whilst those at the bottom suffered a slump. This means that even good departments in some lower ranked universities may suffer indirectly due to a perception that the institute in general is of an overall low standard. The consequences are fairly obvious. Whilst the better universities get even better the poorer ones get even poorer, both in terms of personnel, students and financial support, a situation with clear parallels to the current state of British football. What must also be worrying are the long-term consequences for the lower ranked universities? Drawing on two other football analogies are mergers, or even relegation, a possibility?

