

The academic Olympics



been some muttering about her use of the marking programme Graders R Us which, it is suggested, has given her an unfair advantage over those who do not resort to artificial aids. But success will always attract the envious and the carping, and until the International Pedagogic Committee rules that such programmes count as Category A Software, we are safe.

A fillip from the internet is no different in principle from an extra layer of cork in your running shoes, and is quite unlike the deplorable example of Simony College Oxford, whose chief hope in the 50 minutes seminar competition was found to have packed his audience with loyal and dependent students who were ready with a fillip of flattering questions. He has, quite properly, been rusticated from international conferences for four terms, and will be subject, before he is allowed to compete again, to random tests on his seminars with unannounced hostile questions from a hit squad of undercover discourse theorists.

One weak spot in the School's likely team is the 59 minutes committee chair event. The trial courses have a high level of obstacles, hurdles, and jumps to be negotiated prior to the one minute before the hour finish, and the distractions of 'can I query item four in the draft minutes', 'I know we made a decision in principle last term, but I think we have to judge the present case on its merits', have derailed a lot of promisingly smooth sprints through the agenda. Most hazardous of all so far has been the notorious 'I'm sure Professor Grantfodder means well, but he would need to know as much about the matter as I do before we could take his views seriously', a hedge, or water-jump, which can swiftly sweep the entire discussion off the course and into the ditch of vituperation and complaint, whilst the competitor for chair of the week can only weakly bang his spoon on a glass and call for restraint.

But an area where the School does have high hopes is the international spring vacation conference stakes. For the purposes of the competition, the vacation is limited to one month, and Dr Jerome 'Third' Weigh has already notched up an impressive six conferences in three continents in the first two and a half weeks. The policing of this event is rigorous, and several would-be champions have already received their yellow cards for claiming attendance at conferences where they did no more than collect a free biro from a publisher's stand. But true sporting values will triumph, and we all look forward to cheering on our team with the old cry 'Come on, the Beaver. Beavers don't give a dam.' ■

Rodney Barker

LSE, at the turning point between Westminster and the city, Whitehall and the law courts, the South Bank and the Barbican, has always been at the whirling centre of things, placed at the heart of government, politics, the law, commerce and the arts, a busy market place for every manner of cultural and intellectual exchange.

The recent blossoming of sculpture on campus is only the latest flowering of this rich diversity. But now, with the choice of London for the 2012 Olympics, we can add a further prime location to our list. *Mens sana in corpore sano*, a healthy mind in a healthy body, reminds us that there is more to sporting excellence than leg muscles and strong shoulders.

The *mens* is as important as the *corpus*, and so LSE is already in training for the competitions which will, for the first time in 2012, add

intellectual events to the sprints, long-jumps, hurdles and javelins. The ten and fifteen minutes student counselling hurdles, the four and twenty learned journal article peer reviewing relay, and the shortest reference with the strongest recommendation throw, will each test both aspiring academics and old hands.

There are some bright prospects already, particularly amongst the younger competitors who are not yet so well known to the academic sporting public. I was privileged the other morning to see some of the School's young hopefuls in training. Birgit Puffzapper is a rising star in the essay turnaround stakes, and has already achieved an astonishing 36 hours for the complete reading, grading, commenting on, and return of a trial batch of 25 first year undergraduate psychology essays. There has