

TLC: What we do

The Teaching and Learning Centre supports individuals and departments wishing to develop the quality of teaching and learning in the School. In practical terms the TLC:

- Co-ordinates an in-house programme of events and the initial teaching induction for both full-time and part-time staff involved in teaching and research;
- Offers one-to-one educational consultations tailored to particular needs and interests, including teaching observation;
- Alerts staff to external events, providing funding as appropriate;
- Supports departmental development, following internal departmental reviews;
- Keeps the School up-to-date on developments in teaching and learning in HE nationally and internationally, through departmental links, the Teaching Matters newsletter, and our website;
- Works with the Centre for Learning Technology to aid the integration and use of technology into the main teaching and learning activities of the LSE;
- Co-ordinates student study support across the School including advising students with disabilities and providing dyslexia support;
- Undertakes research into teaching and learning, currently the "LSE PhD experience". We expect this work to contribute to TLC training and development activities for both supervisors and PhD students and guidance to departments on ways of improving PhD provision. Improvement of students' experiences and benchmarking of LSE provision against external indicators and guidance are key objectives of this work.

The financial situation of LSE PhD Students

In 2003 a group of MPhil (Pre-fieldwork PhD) Anthropology students¹ surveyed LSE research students to find out about their financial situation and the extent of PhD student debt. The Teaching and Learning Centre (TLC) was given access to the responses. The following report arises from an analysis of the responses to that survey.

Validity of the sample

306 PhD students responded to the survey. They are distributed across all departments. Comparisons with the current PhD population by departmental affiliation and year of study indicate that some departments are

over-represented (Economics, European Institute) and others are under-represented (Information Systems, International Relations, Sociology). The distribution of students per year of study is set out in table 1 and set beside the sample of respondents to the financial survey.

Table 1: Number of students per year of study

Year of study	Enrolled 2003/04	Percentage of total	Financial survey	%Total Financial survey
1 st	258	19.7	101	33
2 nd	215	16.4	72	23.5
3 rd	204	15.6	58	18.9
4 th	166	12.7	43	14.1
>4 years	466	35.6	32	10.5
Total	1309	100	306	100

Demographics

	UK and other EU students**	Overseas students**
MPhil and PhD*	£2,951	£9,908

*Research degree students who have been registered and paying fees for a year longer than the required minimum period pay a much reduced completion fee thereafter.

**2003/04 fees.

Europe, with 72.2% of responses, represents the vast majority of the respondents. The Americas represent 16.4% (North America: 10.5% and Latin America: 5.9%).

Of 306 respondents, 198 (64.7%) pay home fees and 108 (35.3%) pay overseas fees.

In a three/four-year period, which is seen by some funding bodies as the ideal time to complete a PhD, the difference between home/EU and overseas for fees alone amounts to a total of £20,871/£27828. Considerations on cost of living will be made further down.

70.6% of the respondents are under 30 years old.

This programme is available in electronic format and, on request, in alternative formats. Please contact the TLC Administrator (tlc@lse.ac.uk).

¹ We would like to thank Timm Lau for his feedback and suggestions

Debt

When they start their PhD the majority of students (68.3%) do not have any debt.

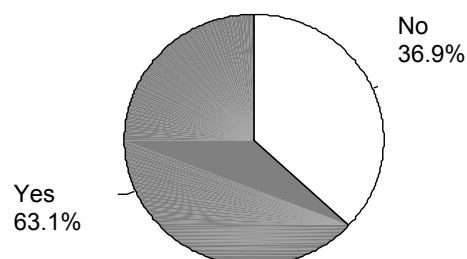
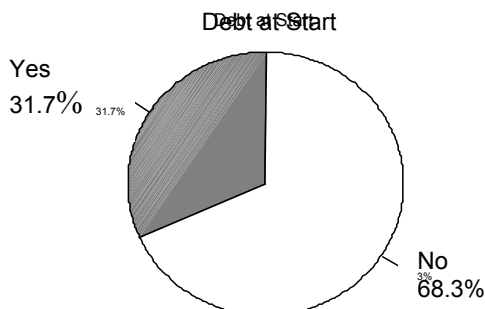


Table 2 shows how debt increases as students progress through their studies.

Table 2: Student debt across the PhD

Debt	% Start	% Moment of Survey	% Finish*
No	68.3	43.1	36.9
Yes	31.7	56.9	63.1
Total	100	100	100

*This is only a predicted situation

Twice the number of students who start their programme with debt have debts by the end of their PhD.

Table 3: Evolution of debt throughout the PhD considering fee status

Debt (%)	Home/EU			Overseas		
	Start (%)	Moment of Survey	Finish* (%)	Start (%)	Moment of Survey	Finish* (%)
No	142 (71.4)	96 (48.2)	76 (38.2)	66 (61.7)	36 (33.6)	31 (29)
Yes	56 (28.6)	103 (51.8)	123 (61.8)	41 (38.3)	71 (66.4)	76 (71)
Total	199 (100)	199 (100)	199 (100)	107 (100)	107 (100)	107 (100)

The numbers in brackets represent the percentages of total students per column.

*Foreseeable

A higher percentage of overseas students start their studies with debt compared to home/EU students. But the decline in their financial situation thereafter is quite similar. The overall pattern of a significant increase in the number of student debtors is observable throughout.

Table 4: Levels of debt (at time of survey) considering fee status (%)

Fee Status	Home	Overseas	Total
No Debt	96 (48.5)	36 (33.3)	132 (43.1)
£100-£1000	22 (11.1)	4 (3.7)	26 (8.5)
£1000-£5,000	39 (19.7)	20 (18.5)	59 (19.3)
£5,000-£10,000	31 (15.65)	29 (26.9)	60 (19.6)
Over £20,000	10 (5.05)	19 (17.6)	29 (9.5)
Total	198 (100)	108 (100)	306 (100)

Almost half of the students paying home fees did not have (at time of the survey) any debt, compared with only a third (33.3%) of the students paying overseas fees. This obviously shows that overseas students are more prone to debt than home and EU students. As well as lower fees, home/EU students may face lower travel expenses. Moreover, for many students the cost of living in London is very high: this is true for all students but home/EU students are likely to have a better knowledge of how the situation is before committing themselves to study here.

More overseas students are in debt than home/EU students and the amounts they owe are considerably higher than those of home/EU students. 56.5% of all overseas students (and 50% of all students) state academic careers as the step following their PhD. This might aggravate overseas students' financial situation since academic jobs are generally known to pay less than jobs in the private sector. But this consideration should also be applied to the 46.5% of home/EU students who also want to become academics. "My earnings after PhD will be much less than [£] 15,000 – [it will be] around [£] 6,000 (six thousand)!!" (fourth year, female overseas student). The choice of a career in the private sector can come as a solution for the debt situation: "[I will] work in [the] private sector because I want to pay off my debts" (first year, female home/EU student)

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Table 5: Concern over studying with debt or debt potential

	<i>Concern over studying with debt or debt potential (%)</i>			
Debt at the moment	Unconcerned	Concerned	Very concerned	Total
No	20 (15.1)	72 (54.6)	40 (30.3)	132 (100)
Yes	14 (8.1)	81 (46.5)	79 (45.4)	174 (100)
Total	34 (11.1)	153 (50)	119 (38.9)	306 (100)

The main conclusion is that students are, in various degrees, concerned over debt. Overall, 38.9% of the students are very concerned with debt. There is no doubt and drawing from the numbers above, that financial issues can be said to be an important and worrying presence in students' life. But does it affect their performance? When asked this question, 162 students, 52.9% of the sample, reported that it does. A surprising response considering that the vast majority of students (88.9%) state they are concerned with debt.

52 students had their library borrowing rights revoked and 18 students had their admission to the library revoked due to not having paid the fees on time. A male overseas first year student described his situation as one of "fear of having [his] library rights revoked". Two students even had to leave London to live in other part of the UK or in the student's home country due to lack of money to live in London. All of the above has a huge impact on the progress of the PhD in terms of time scale, quality of research, quality of life. As a female overseas student who has been doing her PhD for more than 4 years put it: "Boy! I would have been finished 3 years ago had I not had such difficulty meeting tuition costs and the cost of living in London! I had to go home for 18 months and make money in the middle of my PhD work so that I could continue! And, yes, I have had my library rights revoked at times...which is fun (including bringing all the books back to the School and then taking them home again!)"

Funding sources

The majority of students have a 'mix and match' of funding sources to support them through their studies. However, 39.4% of home/EU students and 32.4% of overseas students rely on one single source. Main sources of funding are funding bodies, work and parents (plus family and partners). Home/EU and overseas students appear to resort to funding sources slightly differently.

Whereas 54% of home/EU students and 49.1% of overseas students mentioned funding bodies as a

source of funding (either individually or in conjunction with others), 51% of the former resort to work while 39.8% of the latter resort to it as a funding source. Moreover, overseas students count more on parents (39.8%) while 29.3% of home/EU students do. Savings are the next most mentioned funding source (28.8% of home/EU students and 22.2% of overseas students) followed by Banks (11.1% home/EU; 14.8% overseas).

Work

"The need to work part time has taken up time and energy needed for my studies" (second year, home/EU student)

The majority of students that work (60.4%) do so on a part-time basis while 7.8% have full-time jobs. 31.1% of students do not work. Is it possible to draw any link between work status and debt? 50.5% of students who don't work have no debts. 40% of part-time and 37.5% of full-time workers are in the same situation. So, there is a link between work and debt. If you work you are more likely to have debts and more so if you work full-time rather than on a part-time basis.

Age

Students most likely to be in debt are the 21-25 year olds followed closely by those aged 31-36. The former also represent the highest percentage of students with debts between £1000 and £5000 and the second highest with debts of over £20,000. The over 40s are the biggest group with large debts.

Monthly expenses and shortfall

Table 6: Number of respondents per amount of monthly living costs

Under £500	£501-£1000	£1001-£1500	Over £1500	Total
39 (12.7)	204 (66.7)	44 (14.4)	19 (6.2)	306 (100)

Nearly 80% of students spend under £1000 per month (including rent, food, travel and utilities). The next biggest group is made of students who spend £1001-£1500 a month (14.4%). The students who spend less money are the ones living in their parental home

Table 7: Number of students with monthly shortfall

Monthly shortfall	Number of students
Under £50	5
Over £50	21
Over £100	31
Over £150	47
Total	104

Independently of their financial provisions and arrangements, 104 students, 34% of the total, still have monthly shortfalls in their income.

As stated above, the students more likely to be in debt are those more likely to be working and it is the 21-25 year olds who are the more likely to be in debt. This cohort is certainly the least likely to come into a PhD to further develop an existing professional career. Hence, we could conclude that students work mainly to fund their studies rather than because their research is driven by or related to their job.

Debt is clearly an important consideration and does have impact on studies. This report has raised for us some issues. Have some students unexpectedly incurred debt?; What are students perceptions of debt? Is the choice of where to do a research degree strongly based on financial terms? We will raise them in our continuing research on the LSE PhD experience.

Frederico Matos, Research Officer, TLC, 20/04/2004

Comment from Timm Lau, one of the key students from the Anthropology Department who was involved in undertaking the survey.

Maybe representatively for the Anthropology MPhil students who designed the survey, I am very happy and thankful that TLC has made the decision to analyse and publish the resulting data. This goes to show that we as students can take up issues that concern us, do independent research and contribute to resolving our problems. These often seem out of our reach. They really aren't.

As the article points out, 91.9% of students with debt say that they are concerned or very concerned over debt. However, even in the group of non-debtor students, 84.9% feel the same way. And if your financial situation is such that you need to resort to work, the likelihood is greater that you will also have debt. Only 31.1% of students surveyed do not work. Thus, most students have to work and are debt-prone, especially those with backgrounds that do not support their studies fully. Around the time of the survey, LSE was doing worse in taking in students from "less well-off" backgrounds than either Oxford or Cambridge. If LSE is at all concerned with diversity, this should be seen as another significant conclusion of the survey.

Achieving a first at Oxford: contributing factors

Last session TLC invited Keith Trigwell, from the Oxford Institute for the Advancement for Learning, to talk at LSE about his research (with Paul Ashwin) into the Oxford University student learning

experience. The full report on this study is now available at:

www.learning.ox.ac.uk/iaul/pdf/OLCPFfinal.pdf.

Trigwell's research develops on from John Biggs' three-P model of student attainment: presage, process and product. Biggs sees this as a continuum where students' learning perceptions and outcomes interact to influence each other. Presage refers to students' "entry" characteristics, and to the course and departmental context. Product refers to learning outcomes. What Trigwell introduces to Biggs' conceptions of process is that student perceptions of context and their approaches to learning are crucial to their learning experiences and outcomes.

Previously, the Oxford University Commission of Inquiry had analysed some student activities that could be directly related to outcomes, such as hours spent studying, library use and number of tutorials. What this earlier study had not done was to focus on student approaches to learning and their perceptions of the context. This "middle path" is the core of Trigwell's approach. In terms of approaches to learning, Trigwell distinguishes between "deep" and "surface" approaches, where the former involves the student in seeking a considered understanding of the ideas under consideration, and the latter sees learning more as a series of externally driven tasks to be fulfilled. Trigwell also considers student motivation, emphasising the importance of self-regulation, self-efficacy and task value.

A key finding from the study was that student perceptions of workload are closely related both to their approach to learning and to their final outcomes. Students who perceive the workload to be high, and who adopt a surface approach to learning are less likely to be successful in the Oxford context.

The final report of the study also includes some interesting observations on student perceptions of the quality of the learning experience when it is provided by graduate students rather than full time faculty, which should make interesting reading for LSE colleagues, given our high usage of graduate teachers. Whilst the Oxford tutorial is still highly valued by its students, classes run by graduate students appear to be met with much more mixed reactions.

A conclusion from the study was that, given the consistently high academic credentials of applicants, the selection process could usefully focus on student perceptions of learning and their approach to learning.

Frederico Matos, Research Officer, TLC