

Issue 24, May 2008

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**The Postgraduate Certificate in Higher Education 2007 results**

The Postgraduate Certificate in Higher Education is a nationally recognised qualification for new lecturers / tutors in HE. It is a requirement for new lecturers at most UK universities and the course is in its third year at the LSE, where it is offered for free and is mostly taken by new faculty and PhD students with teaching responsibilities. Last summer 15 candidates successfully passed the full Certificate and 11 completed the associate level standard.

Feedback on the second year of the course has been positive with 100% of respondents recommending the programme for those seeking a career in UK academia. Key benefits identified are enjoying and improving candidates' teaching...

***I have developed greater confidence in my teaching and improved those aspects of my teaching that I felt were weaker. I also feel more able to spontaneously react to a variety of situations based on the discussions we have had during the workshops.***

***It is great training when you start teaching, especially when course directors just leave you to your own devices and offer very limited support - you are supposed to just teach. And for the second year of teaching, it reminds you to keep reflecting on your teaching and finding ways to improve it. It also looks great on a CV.***

... as well as the value of the Certificate in the academic job market.

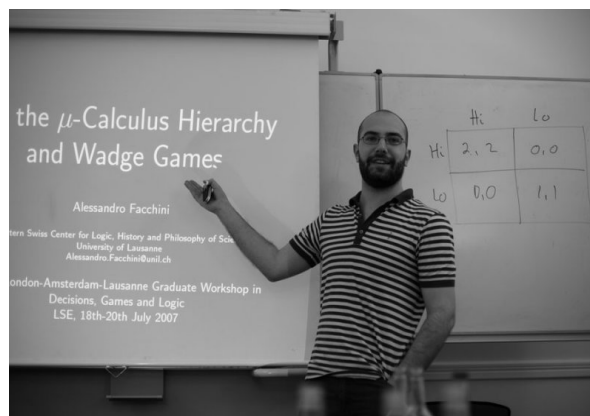
***The PGCert was a huge asset to me when it came to applying for a teaching post. I***

***included a written module in the work I submitted to the selection panel and was asked in the interview about my experience/benefits of the PGCert. I was very enthusiastic. They seemed impressed. I got the job.***

***Taking the Certificate has benefited me in two ways. Firstly, the LSE PG Cert. has promoted a process of reflection regarding my own teaching. Secondly, I do not have to undergo further teacher training in my new position.***

The flexibility of the two year course was also highlighted.

***The flexibility of the Cert. was one of the main factors in my decision to participate. Initially I thought pursuing the programme in parallel with my research would be challenging, but the absence of compulsory elements has allowed me to tailor the Cert. to fit in with my other commitments. The few deadlines that exist are sufficiently well-spaced to avoid overload.***



The 2007/8 programme has seen a further dramatic increase in numbers enrolling on the programme - we currently have over 100 participants. 11 candidates successfully completed the associate and 4 the full programme in December 2007, and we anticipate that around 50 will complete this summer. PhD students and staff interested in joining the programme for

2008/9 should contact the TLC or Neil McLean at [n.d.mclean@lse.ac.uk](mailto:n.d.mclean@lse.ac.uk).

Below is a list of those who successfully completed the programme last year.

#### Full Certificate July 2007

Aseel Al-Ramahi	Law
Dr Annika Bolten	International Relations
Dr Antoine Bousquet	International Relations
Zsusanna Chappell	Government
Dr Nicola Countouris	University of Reading (formerly LSE Law department)
Dr Simon Curtis	International Relations
Dr Tanya Harmer	International History
Dr John Heathershaw	University of Exeter (formerly LSE International Relations)
Rune Henriksen	Government
Dr Aiobheann Kilfeather	University of Durham (formerly LSE Geography)
Dr Robert Kissack	International Relations
Marjo Koivisto	International Relations
Simona Manea	International Relations
Dr Kai Spiekermann	Government
Dr Victor Teo	International Relations
Dr Andreas Warntjen	Government

#### Associate Level July 2007

James Abdey	Statistics
Ely Aharonson	Government
Kofi Boateng	Information Systems
Dr Tania Burchardt	Social Policy
Parissa Dashtipour	Social Psychology
Dr Simon Gosling	Geography
Federico Iannacci	Information Systems
Seong-Hoon Kim	Accounting
Sarah McLaughlin	Government
Ulriche Theuerkauf	Government
Markus Wagner	Government



**PhD projects funded by the Teaching and Learning Centre**

TLC is able to provide some funding for departments or research centres seeking financial support for their own professional development projects for PhD students and/or postdoctoral researchers (the 'Roberts Researcher Development Fund').

Examples of recently-funded projects include the following:

**Project title: PhD Mentoring Scheme**  
**Department/research centre: Institute of Social Psychology**  
**Project Leader: Sharon Attia**

The ISP mentoring scheme is a support network run by and for PhD students. Mentoring involves a more advanced PhD student sharing his/her personal experience with another PhD student one year below him/her. Mentors are responsible for at least one but no more than two mentees. The system is not designed to replace supervision but to extend it through student-to-student exchange on issues such as time management, emotional support, relationship with supervisor and research practice.

The vast majority of those taking part in the scheme have found it helpful.

***I think it [the mentoring scheme] is a great thing. Not only because it helps you discussing and getting ideas for you work, but it also creates the opportunity to make good friends. Because you discuss things that you would normally not discuss with your supervisor.***

***Even though I have not met often with my mentors, I appreciated knowing that it was 'ok' to approach both of them with questions when I needed help. As much as anything I have appreciated their friendship and their personal support!***

Given the success of mentoring in Social Psychology, several other departments have now implemented similar schemes with the advice of the project leaders in ISP, and with start-up financial support from TLC.

**Project title: Economics & Philosophy Reading Group**  
**Department/research centre: CPNSS / Philosophy**  
**Project Leader: Conrad Heilmann**

The Economics and Philosophy Reading Group included participants from many departments of LSE (Economics, Philosophy, Government, Mathematics and Operations Research). Up to 20 people attended each Reading Group session, whose focus moved from decision theory in the Michaelmas term, to game theory in the Lent term and to econometrics in the summer term.



In addition to their regular meetings, the Group organised a highly successful year-end workshop on 'Decisions, Games & Logic' (<http://meansandends.com/workshop07/>) with three invited speakers and about 25 participants, mainly graduate students and postdoctoral researchers from Amsterdam, Lausanne and London. The event was also part-funded by the Economics Department and included three tutorials on decision theory, game theory and logic, as well as graduate presentations on the intersections of these disciplines. The event provided an opportunity for the exchange of ideas between graduate students from different universities and from diverse departments within LSE.

The three tutorials by invited speakers were a key factor in the success of the workshop, while the participation of keen and active graduate students from all over Europe was beneficial for all involved, and surprisingly easy to achieve.

**Project title: London PhD Poster Day**  
**Department/research centre: Department of Management**  
**Project leader: Emma Anderson**

The London PhD Poster Day was organized by the Management Department and involved PhD students from other LSE departments and London universities. The event gave students the opportunity to present and exhibit summaries of their research to academics and other PhD students and to receive constructive comments and feedback on their work to date. Each LSE student was offered up to £20 for the professional printing of his/her poster from the funds provided by TLC.

The main skills developed by the workshop were:

- Research Management – Students needed to critically evaluate their work in preparing their presentations and then to re-evaluate their research after having received feedback.
- Communication Skills – Students needed to present their work in a clear and concise manner. They also had to answer any questions arising from their work.

- Networking – The event gave students an opportunity to make new contacts with academics and students from other departments and universities.

The Management Department hope to run similar and similarly successful events in the future.

For more information on funding criteria for the Roberts Researcher Development Fund and application forms see <http://www.lse.ac.uk/collections/TLCPhD/robertsRDF.htm>.

### **Libraries, social software and distance learners: the adventures of LASSIE**

Everyone seems to be talking (or blogging) about web 2.0 or social software at the moment. Not a day goes by when there isn't a new story about the social networking site [Facebook](#), or a company buying space in [Second Life](#). Librarians and libraries are certainly no different and the web 2.0 phenomena has achieved a tremendous momentum recently.

A team based at LSE and the Institute of Education, led by Dr Jane Secker from the Centre for Learning Technology, recently completed the [LASSIE \(Libraries and Social Software in Education\) project](#) to explore how social software might enhance distance learners' experience of libraries. The project, which was funded by the University of London's Centre for Distance Education, published a [literature review](#) and found the library world is full of people exploring how these technologies might be used. Librarians are keen bloggers and in the US many libraries are using blogs for news stories and to keep their website looking fresh. See for example [Madison-Jefferson County Public library](#), [Ohio University Library Business Blog](#) and [Kansas State University library blogs](#). The team spent some time exploring the role of blogging in libraries and maintain the [LASSIE blog](#) for anyone interested in keeping up to date with developments in this area.

Library 'patrons' are being encouraged to subscribe to a variety of RSS feeds to keep up to date with library news and acquisitions to the library catalogue and electronic resources. MIT Libraries maintain a list of [RSS feeds](#) available from their site. Meanwhile, closer to home London School of Economics and Political Science, have developed a [Training website](#) which uses RSS technology, and has a feed that is being incorporated into the VLE, Moodle and the institutional portal.

In a more revolutionary move in some libraries, user generated content, such as book reviews and comments is being added to the library catalogue. See for example [Hennepin County](#)



[Library](#) and the [University of Huddersfield](#) which is allowing students to rate books.

LASSIE's adventures were completed in January 2008 and a final report, literature review and five case study reports are available from the [project website](#). Anyone wanting further information about this project can also contact [j.secker@lse.ac.uk](mailto:j.secker@lse.ac.uk).

### **Why Don't All Lecturers Make Use of VLEs? What Can the So-called "Laggards" Tell Us?**

Virtual learning environments (VLEs) provide websites for courses and allow for online interactions between tutors and students. VLEs have been adopted by nearly all UK higher education institutions however the available research appears to show that take-up by individual academic staff is more varied. The LSE's new VLE is Moodle (replacing WebCT) and it is used across all academic departments on an estimated 40% of taught courses with considerable growth in 2007/8.

In his recent Masters thesis, Matt Lingard of the Centre for Learning Technology (CLT) investigated the above question through interviews with five members of LSE staff. His results are summarised below, but for a full copy of the thesis text go to:

<http://clt.lse.ac.uk/reportsPubs/ReportLingardFinal.pdf>

### **Staff Skills and Attitudes**

The first connection between the case studies is that all five lecturers are comfortable using basic ICTs such as email, software for producing electronic documents and the Internet for information retrieval. There was also a positive attitude to teaching across the cases. Although both the high status of research and the varied pressures on their limited time were cited by some, it is apparent that amongst this group teaching is generally enjoyed, carefully planned and taken very seriously.

### **Conceptions of VLE Use**

Although none of the lecturers are currently using a VLE there was a strong awareness of the existence of the institutional VLE and an understanding of how LSE colleagues are using it, and of its potential uses. Three of the lecturers were using alternative ICTs to the VLE in their teaching for distributing lecture notes and communicating with their students. Only one of the three saw the VLE as a more effective way of replicating these uses, although he also imagined it offered more than that. The other two had a slightly different perception of what the VLE is for. It was seen by both as being more for online exercises for formative assessment.

### **Pedagogy and Students**

There was a clear pedagogical influence on some of the decisions for not using the VLE. In three of the cases, the lecturers' expectations of what their students should be doing and the effects that certain uses of the VLE might have on this were raised. The use of the VLE for direct access to electronic readings was questioned by two lecturers who feared it might have a negative impact on students' research skills. One lecturer also had pedagogical reasons for not wanting to post lecture notes; he was concerned that if this resulted in non-attendance then the development of the students' note-taking skills and their ability to synthesise a presentation would be affected.

### **Time and Priorities**

Perhaps not surprisingly, the perennial issue of time and how it is best used was referred to in four of the cases. One lecturer felt strongly that the time she allocated to teaching was better spent on other things – reading and lecture preparation. In two of the cases the multiple roles of an academic were highlighted and in one the importance of research noted. This supports earlier work on VLE adoption, where both recognition for research rather than teaching, and prioritising the use of time have been identified as barriers.



The results of this study show that for VLE adoption at the LSE some staff are not necessarily unaware of the possibility and simply slow to adopt. Rather, they are active rejecters of the innovation, with some using alternative ICTs and some choosing not to use the VLE for a variety of reasons including pedagogical ones and their understanding of what the VLE is for. If you'd like to find out more about the use of the VLE at the LSE please contact the Centre for Learning Technology: [clt-support@lse.ac.uk](mailto:clt-support@lse.ac.uk)